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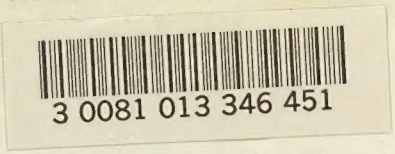
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ROBERT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS

VOL. VII.

Comprising Volumes XIV. and XV. of the
Edition in 17 Volumes

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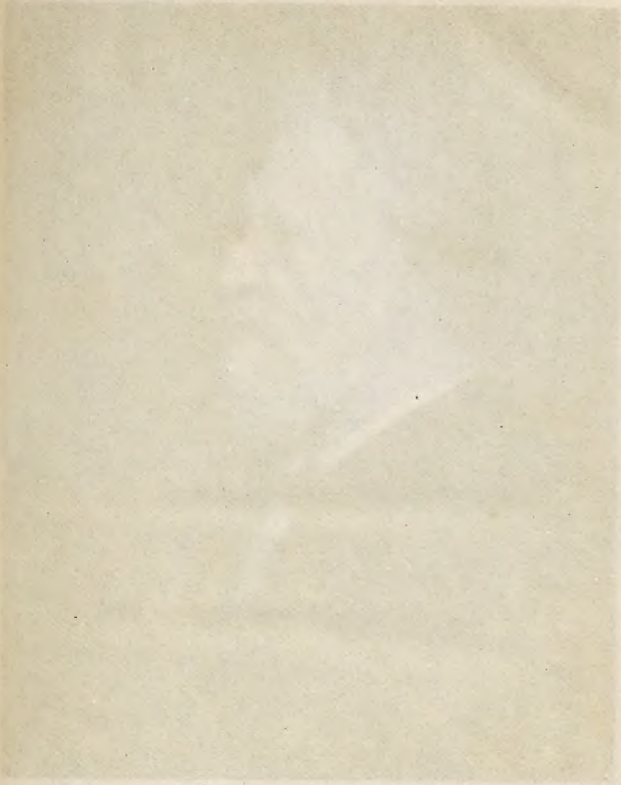

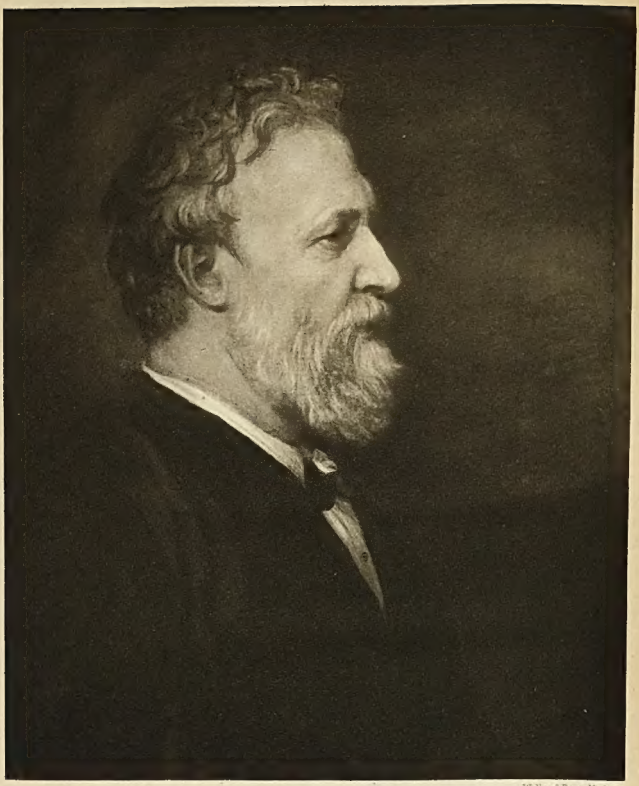

Walker & Boutall, ph. sc.

Robert Browning
1875.
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THE POETICAL WORKS

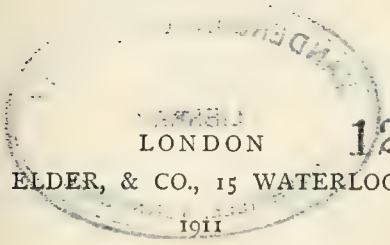
of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. XIV.

PACCHIAROTTO
AND
HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

WITH OTHER POEMS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PACCHIAROTTO

AND

HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER

ET CETERA

PROLOGUE.

I.

O the old wall here! How I could pass
Life in a long Midsummer day,
My feet confined to a plot of grass,
My eyes from a wall not once away!

II.

And lush and lithe do the creepers clothe
Yon wall I watch, with a wealth of green:
Its bald red bricks draped, nothing loth,
In lappets of tangle they laugh between.

III.

Now, what is it makes pulsate the robe?
Why tremble the sprays? What life o'erbrims
The body,—the house, no eye can probe,—
Divined as, beneath a robe, the limbs?

IV.

And there again! But my heart may guess
Who tripped behind; and she sang perhaps:
So, the old wall throbbed, and its life's excess
Died out and away in the leafy wraps.

V.

Wall upon wall are between us: life
And song should away from heart to heart.
I—prison-bird, with a ruddy strife
At breast, and a lip whence storm-notes start—

VI.

Hold on, hope hard in the subtle thing
That 's spirit: though cloistered fast, soar free;
Account as wood, brick, stone, this ring
Of the rueful neighbours, and—forth to thee!

OF PACCHIAROTTO, AND HOW HE WORKED IN DISTEMPER.

1876

I.

QUERY: was ever a quainter
Crotchet than this of the painter
Giacomo Pacchiarotto
Who took "Reform" for his motto?

II.

He, pupil of old Fungaio,
Is always confounded (heigho!)
With Pacchia, contemporaneous
No question, but how extraneous
In the grace of soul, the power
Of hand,—undoubted dower
Of Pacchia who decked (as *we* know,
My Kirkup!) San Bernardino,

Turning the small dark Oratory
To Siena's Art-laboratory,
As he made its straitness roomy
And glorified its gloomy,
With Bazzi and Beccafumi.
(Another heigho for Bazzi:
How people miscall him Razzi!)

III.

This Painter was of opinion
Our earth should be his dominion
Whose Art could correct to pattern
What Nature had slurred –the slattern!
And since, beneath the heavens,
Things lay now at sixes and sevens,
Or, as he said, *sopra-sotto*—
Thought the painter Pacchiarotto
Things wanted reforming, therefore.
"Wanted it"—ay, but wherefore?
When earth held one so ready
As he to step forth, stand steady
In the middle of God's creation
And prove to demonstration
What the dark is, what the light is,
What the wrong is, what the right is,

What the ugly, what the beautiful,
What the restive, what the dutiful,
In Mankind profuse around him?
Man, devil as now he found him,
Would presently soar up angel
At the summons of such evangel,
And owe—what would Man *not* owe
To the painter Pacchiarotto?
Ay, look to thy laurels, Giotto!

IV

But Man, he perceived, was stubborn,
Grew regular brute, once cub born;
And it struck him as expedient—
Ere he tried to make obedient
The wolf, fox, bear and monkey,
By piping advice in one key—
That his pipe should play a prelude
To something heaven-tinged not hell-hued,
Something not harsh but docile,
Man-liquid, not Man-fossil—
Not fact, in short, but fancy.
By a laudable necromancy
He would conjure up ghosts—a circle
Deprived of the means to work ill

Should his music prove distasteful
And pearls to the swine go wasteful.
To be rent of swine—that *was* hard!
With fancy he ran no hazard:
Fact might knock him o'er the mazzard.

V

So, the painter Pacchiarotto
Constructed himself a grotto
In the quarter of Stalloreggi—
As authors of note allege ye.
And on each of the whitewashed sides of it
He painted—(none far and wide so fit
As he to perform in fresco)—
He painted nor cried *quiesco*
Till he peopled its every square foot
With Man—from the Beggar barefoot
To the Noble in cap and feather:
All sorts and conditions together.
The Soldier in breastplate and helmet
Stood frowningly—hail fellow well met—
By the Priest armed with bell, book and candle.
Nor did he omit to handle
The Fair Sex, our brave distemperer:
Not merely King, Clown, Pope, Emperor—
He diversified too his Hades

Of all forms, pinched Labour and paid Ease,
With as mixed an assemblage of Ladies.

VI.

Which work done, dry,—he rested him,
Cleaned pallet, washed brush, divested him
Of the apron that suits *frescanti*,
And, bonnet on ear stuck jaunty,
This hand upon hip well planted,
That, free to wave as it wanted,
He addressed in a choice oration
His folk of each name and nation,
Taught its duty to every station.
The Pope was declared an arrant
Impostor at once, I warrant.
The Emperor—truth might tax him
With ignorance of the maxim
"Shear sheep but nowise flay them!"
And the Vulgar that obey them,
The Ruled, well-matched with the Ruling,
They failed not of wholesome schooling
On their knavery and their fooling.
As for Art—where's decorum? Pooh-poohed it is
By Poets that plague us with lewd ditties,
And Painters that pester with nudities!

VII.

Now, your rater and debater
Is baulked by a mere spectator
Who simply stares and listens
Tongue tied, while eye nor glistens
Nor brow grows hot and twitchy,
Nor mouth, for a combat itchy,
Quivers with some convincing
Reply—that sets him wincing?
Nay, rather—reply that furnishes
Your debater with just what burnishes
The crest of him, all one triumph,
As you see him rise, hear him cry "Humph!
Convinced am I? This confutes me?
Receive the rejoinder that suits me!
Confutation of vassal for prince meet—
Wherein all the powers that convince meet,
And mash my opponent to mincemeat!"

VIII.

So, off from his head flies the bonnet,
His hip loses hand planted on it,
While t' other hand, frequent in gesture,
Slinks modestly back beneath vesture,
As,—hop, skip and jump,—he 's along with

Those weak ones he late proved so strong with!
Pope, Emperor, lo, he 's beside them,
Friendly now, who late could not abide them,
King, Clown, Soldier, Priest, Noble, Burgess;
And his voice, that out-roared Boanerges,
How minikin-mildly it urges
In accents how gentled and gingered
Its word in defence of the injured!
"O call him not culprit, this Pontiff!
Be hard on this Kaiser ye won't if
Ye take into con-si-der-ation
What dangers attend elevation!
The Priest—who expects him to descant
On duty with more zeal and less cant?
He preaches but rubbish he 's reared in.
The Soldier, grown deaf (by the mere din
Of battle) to mercy, learned tippling
And what not of vice while a stripling.
The Lawyer—his lies are conventional.
And as for the Poor Sort—why mention all
Obstructions that leave barred and bolted
Access to the brains of each dolt-head?"

IX.

He ended, you wager? Not half! A bet?
Precedence to males in the alphabet!

Still, disposed of Man's A, B, C, there 's X,
Y, Z, want assistance,—the Fair Sex!
How much may be said in excuse of
Those vanities—males see no use of—
From silk shoe on heel to laced poll's-hood!
What 's their frailty beside our own falsehood?
The boldest, most brazen of . . . trumpets,
How kind can they be to their dumb pets!
Of their charms—how are most frank, how few venal!
While as for those charges of Juvenal—
Quæ nemo dixisset in toto
Nisi (*ædepol*) *ore illoto*—
He dismissed every charge with an "*Apage!*"

x.

Then, cocking (in Scotch phrase) his cap a-gee,
Right hand disengaged from the doublet
—Like landlord, in house he had sub-let
Resuming of guardianship gestion,
To call tenants' conduct in question—
Hop, skip, jump, to inside from outside
Of chamber, he lords, ladies, louts eyed
With such transformation of visage
As fitted the censor of this age.
No longer an advocate tepid
Of frailty, but champion intrepid

Of strength, not of falsehood but verity,
He, one after one, with asperity
Stripped bare all the cant-clothed abuses,
Disposed of sophistic excuses,
Forced folly each shift to abandon,
And left vice with no leg to stand on.
So crushing the force he exerted,
That Man at his foot lay converted!

XI.

True—Man bred of paint-pot and mortar!
But why suppose folks of this sort are
More likely to hear and be tractable
Than folks all alive and, in fact, able
To testify promptly by action
Their ardour, and make satisfaction
For misdeeds *non verbis sed factis?*
"With folk all alive be my practice
Henceforward! O mortar, paint-pot O,
Farewell to ye!" cried Pacchiarotto,
"Let only occasion intérpose!"

XII.

It did so: for, pat to the purpose
Through causes I need not examine,

There fell upon Siena a famine.
In vain did the magistrates busily
Seek succour, fetch grain out of Sicily,
Nay, throw mill and bakehouse wide open—
Such misery followed as no pen
Of mine shall depict ye. Faint, fainter
Waxed hope of relief: so, our painter,
Emboldened by triumph of recency,
How could he do other with decency
Than rush in this strait to the rescue,
Play schoolmaster, point as with fescue
To each and all slips in Man's spelling
The law of the land?—slips now telling
With monstrous effect on the city,
Whose magistrates moved him to pity
As, bound to read law to the letter,
They minded their hornbook no better.

XIII.

I ought to have told you, at starting,
How certain, who itched to be carting
Abuses away clean and thorough
From Siena, both province and borough,
Had formed themselves into a company
Whose swallow could bolt in a lump any

Obstruction of scruple, provoking
The nicer throat's coughing and choking:
Fit Club, by as fit a name dignified
Of "Freed Ones"—"*Bardotti*"—which signified
"Spare-Horses" that walk by the waggon
The team has to drudge for and drag on.
This notable club Pacchiarotto
Had joined long since, paid scot and lot to,
As free and accepted "Bardotto."
The Bailiwick watched with no quiet eye
The outrage thus done to society,
And noted the advent especially
Of Pachiarotto their fresh ally.

XIV.

These Spare-Horses forthwith assembled:
Neighed words whereat citizens trembled
As oft as the chiefs, in the Square by
The Duomo, proposed a way whereby
The city were cured of disaster.
"Just substitute servant for master,
Make Poverty Wealth and Wealth Poverty,
Unloose Man from overt and covert tie,
And straight out of social confusion
True Order would spring!" Brave illusion—
Aims heavenly attained by means earthy!

XV.

Off to these at full speed rushed our worthy,—
Brain practised and tongue no less tutored,
In argument's armour accoutred,—
Sprang forth, mounted rostrum and essayed
Proposals like those to which "Yes" said
So glibly each personage painted
O' the wall-side wherewith you 're acquainted.
He harangued on the faults of the Bailiwick:
"Red soon were our State-candle's paly wick,
If wealth would become but interfluous,
Fill voids up with just the superfluous;
If ignorance gave way to knowledge
—Not pedantry picked up at college
From Doctors, Professors *et cætera*—
(*They* say: '*kai ta loipa*'—like better a
Long Greek string of *kappas*, *taus*, *lambdas*,
Tacked on to the tail of each damned ass)—
No knowledge we want of this quality,
But knowledge indeed—practicality
Through insight's fine universality!
If you shout '*Bailiffs, out on ye all! Fie,*
Thou Chief of our forces, Amalfi,
Who shieldest the rogue and the clotpoll!'
If you pounce on and poke out, with what pole

I leave ye to fancy, our Siena's
Beast-litter of sloths and hyenas—"
(Whoever to scan this is ill able
Forgets the town's name 's a dissyllable)
"If, this done, ye did—as ye might—place
For once the right man in the right place,
If you listened to me . . ."

XVI.

At which last "If"
There flew at his throat like a mastiff
One Spare-Horse—another and another!
Such outbreak of tumult and pother,
Horse-faces a-laughing and fleering,
Horse-voices a-mocking and jeering,
Horse-hands raised to collar the caitiff
Whose impudence ventured the late "If"—
That, had not fear sent Pacchiarotto
Off tramping, as fast as could trot toe,
Away from the scene of discomfiture—
Had he stood there stock-still in a dumb fit—sure
Am I he had paid in his person
Till his mother might fail to know her son,
Though she gazed on him never so wistful,
In the figure so tattered and tristful.

Each mouth full of curses, each fist full
Of cuffings—behold, Pacchiarotto,
The pass which thy project has got to,
Of trusting, nigh ashes still hot—tow!
(The paraphrase—which I much need—is
From Horace "*per ignes incedis.*")

XVII.

Right and left did he dash helter-skelter
In agonized search of a shelter.
No purlieu so blocked and no alley
So blind as allowed him to rally
His spirits and see—nothing hampered
His steps if he trudged and not scampered
Up here and down there in a city
That 's all ups and downs, more the pity
For folk who would outrun the constable.
At last he stopped short at the one stable
And sure place of refuge that 's offered
Humanity. Lately was coffered
A corpse in its sepulchre, situate
By St. John's Observance. "Habituate
Thyself to the strangest of bedfellows,
And, kicked by the live, kiss the dead fellows!"
So Misery counselled the craven.

At once he crept safely to haven
Through a hole left unbricked in the structure.
Ay, Misery, in have you tucked your
Poor client and left him conterminous
With—pah!—the thing fetid and verminous!
(I gladly would spare you the detail,
But History writes what I retail.)

XVIII.

Two days did he groan in his domicile:
"Good Saints, set me free and I promise I 'll
Abjure all ambition of preaching
Change, whether to minds touched by teaching
—The smooth folk of fancy, mere figments
Created by plaster and pigments,—
Or to minds that receive with such rudeness
Dissuasion from pride, greed and lewdness,
—The rough folk of fact, life's true specimens
Of mind—'*haud in posse sed esse mens*'
As it was, is, and shall be for ever
Despite of my utmost endeavour.
O live foes I thought to illumine,
Henceforth lie untroubled your gloom in!
I need my own light, every spark, as
I couch with this sole friend—a carcase!"

XIX.

Two days thus he maundered and rambled;
Then, starved back to sanity, scrambled
From out his receptacle loathsome.
"A spectre!"—declared upon oath some
Who saw him emerge and (appalling
To mention) his garments a-crawling
With plagues far beyond the Egyptian.
He gained, in a state past description
A convent of monks, the Observancy.

XX.

Thus far is a fact: I reserve fancy
For Fancy's more proper employment:
And now she waves wing with enjoyment,
To tell ye how preached the Superior
When somewhat our painter's exterior
Was sweetened. He needed (no mincing
The matter) much soaking and rincing,
Nay, rubbing with drugs odoriferous,
Till, rid of his garments pestiferous
And robed by the help of the Brotherhood
In odds and ends,—this gown and t' other hood,—
His empty inside first well-garnished,—
He delivered a tale round, unvarnished.

XXI.

"Ah, Youth!" ran the Abbot's admonishment,
"Thine error scarce moves my astonishment.
For—why shall I shrink from asserting?—
Myself have had hopes of converting
The foolish to wisdom, till, sober,
My life found its May grow October.
I talked and I wrote, but, one morning,
Life's Autumn bore fruit in this warning:
'*Let tongue rest, and quiet thy quill be!*
Earth is earth and not heaven, and ne'er will be.'
Man's work is to labour and leaven—
As best he may—earth here with heaven;
'T is work for work's sake that he 's needing:
Let him work on and on as if speeding
Work's end, but not dream of succeeding!
Because if success were intended,
Why, heaven would begin ere earth ended.
A Spare-Horse? Be rather a thill-horse,
Or—what 's the plain truth—just a mill-horse!
Earth 's a mill where we grind and wear mufflers:
A whip awaits shirkers and shufflers
Who slacken their pace, sick of lugging
At what don't advance for their tugging.

Though round goes the mill, we must still post
On and on as if moving the mill-post.
So, grind away, mouth-wise and pen-wise,
Do all that we can to make men wise!
And if men prefer to be foolish,
Ourselves have proved horse-like not mulish:
Sent grist, a good sackful, to hopper,
And worked as the Master thought proper.
Tongue I wag, pen I ply, who am Abbot;
Stick thou, Son, to daub-brush and dab-pot!
But, soft! I scratch hard on the scab hot?
Though cured of thy plague, there may linger
A pimple I fray with rough finger?
So soon could my homily transmute
Thy brass into gold? Why, the man 's mute!"

XXII.

"Ay, Father, I 'm mute with admiring
How Nature's indulgence untiring
Still bids us turn deaf ear to Reason's
Best rhetoric—clutch at all seasons
And hold fast to what 's proved untenable!
Thy maxim is—Man 's not amenable
To argument: whereof by consequence—
Thine arguments reach me: a non-sequence!

Yet blush not discouraged, O Father!
I stand unconverted, the rather
That nowise I need a conversion.
No live man (I cap thy assertion)
By argument ever could take hold
Of me. 'T was the dead thing, the clay-cold,
Which grinned '*Art thou so in a hurry*
That out of warm light thou must skurry
And join me down here in the dungeon
Because, above, one's Jack and one—John,
One's swift in the race, one—a hobbler,
One's a crowned king, and one—a capped cobbler,
Rich and poor, sage and fool, virtuous, vicious?
Why complain? Art thou so unsuspicious
That all's for an hour of essaying
Who's fit and who's unfit for playing
His part in the after-construction
—Heaven's Piece whereof Earth's the Induction?
Things rarely go smooth at Rehearsal.
Wait patient the change universal,
And act, and let act, in existence!
For, as thou art clapped hence or hissed hence,
Thou hast thy promotion or otherwise.
And why must wise thou have thy brother wise
Because in rehearsal thy cue be
To shine by the side of a booby?

No polishing garnet to ruby!
All 's well that ends well—through Art's magic
Some end, whether comic or tragic,
The Artist has purposed, be certain!
Explained at the fall of the curtain—
In showing thy wisdom at odds with
That folly: he tries men and gods with
No problem for weak wits to solve meant,
But one worth such Author's evolvement.
So, back nor disturb play's production
By giving thy brother instruction
To throw up his fool's-part allotted!
Lest haply thyself prove besotted
When stript, for thy pains, of that costume
Of sage, which has bred the imposthume
I prick to relieve thee of,—Vanity!'

XXIII.

"So, Father, behold me in sanity!
I 'm back to the palette and mahlstick:
And as for Man—let each and all stick
To what was prescribed them at starting
Once planted as fools—no departing
From folly one inch, *sæculorum*
In sæcula! Pass me the jorum.

And push me the platter—my stomach
Retains, through its fasting, still some ache—
And then, with your kind *Benedicite*,
Good-bye!"

XXIV.

I have told with simplicity
My tale, dropped those harsh analytics,
And tried to content you, my critics,
Who greeted my early uprising!
I knew you through all the disguising,
Droll dogs, as I jumped up, cried "Heyday!
This Monday is—what else but May-day?
And these in the drabs, blues and yellows,
Are surely the privileged fellows.
So, saltbox and bones, tongs and bellows,"
(I threw up the window) "your pleasure?"

XXV.

Then he who directed the measure—
An old friend—put leg forward nimbly,
"We critics as sweeps out your chimbly!
Much soot to remove from your flue, sir!
Who spares coal in kitchen an't you, sir!

And neighbours complain it 's no joke, sir,
—You ought to consume your own smoke, sir!"

XXVI.

Ah, rogues, but my housemaid suspects you—
Is confident oft she detects you
In bringing more filth into my house
Than ever you found there! I 'm pious
However: 't was God made you dingy
And me—with no need to be stingy
Of soap, when 't is sixpence the packet.
So, dance away, boys, dust my jacket,
Bang drum and blow fife—ay, and rattle
Your brushes, for that 's half the battle!
Don't trample the grass,—hocus-pocus
With grime my Spring snowdrop and crocus,—
And, what with your rattling and tinkling,
Who knows but you give me an inkling
How music sounds, thanks to the jangle
Of regular drum and triangle?
Whereby, tap-tap, chink-chink, 't is proven
I break rule as bad as Beethoven.
"That chord now—a groan or a grunt is 't?
Schumann's self was no worse contrapuntist.
No ear! or if ear, so tough-gristled—
He thought that he sung while he whistled!"

XXVII.

So, this time I whistle, not sing at all,
My story, the largess I fling at all
And every the rough there whose *aubade*
Did its best to amuse me,—nor *so* bad!
Take my thanks, pick up largess, and scamper
Off free, ere your mirth gets a damper!
You 've Monday, your one day, your fun-day,
While mine is a year that 's all Sunday.
I 've seen you, times—who knows how many?—
Dance in here, strike up, play the zany,
Make mouths at the tenant, hoot warning
You 'll find him decamped next May-morning;
Then scuttle away, glad to 'scape hence
With—kicks? no, but laughter and ha'pence!
Mine 's freehold, by grace of the grand Lord
Who lets out the ground here,—my landlord:
To him I pay quit-rent—devotion;
Nor hence shall I budge, I 've a notion,
Nay, here shall my whistling and singing
Set all his street's echoes a-ringing
Long after the last of your number
Has ceased my front-court to encumber
While, treading down rose and ranunculus,
You *Tommy-make-room-for-your-Uncle* us!

Troop, all of you—man or homunculus,
Quick march! for Xanthippe, my housemaid,
If once on your pates she a souse made
With what, pan or pot, bowl or *skoramis*
First comes to her hand—things were more amiss!
I would not for worlds be your place in—
Recipient of slops from the basin!
You, Jack-in-the-Green, leaf-and-twiggishness
Won't save a dry thread on your priggishness!
While as for Quilp-Hop-o'-my-thumb there,
Banjo-Byron that twangs the strum-strum there—
He 'll think, as the pickle he curses,
I 've discharged on his pate his own verses!
"Dwarfs are saucy," says Dickens: so, sauced in
Your own sauce, . . .[1]

XXVIII.

But, back to my Knight of the Pencil,
Dismissed to his fresco and stencil!
Whose story—begun with a chuckle,
And throughout timed by raps of the knuckle,—
To small enough purpose were studied
If it ends with crown cracked or nose bloodied.

[1] No, please! For

"Who would be satirical
On a thing so very small?"—PRINTER'S DEVIL.

Come, critics,—not shake hands, excuse me!
But—say have you grudged to amuse me
This once in the forty-and-over
Long years since you trampled my clover
And scared from my house-eaves each sparrow
I never once harmed by that arrow
Of song, *karterotaton belos*,
(Which Pindar declares the true *melos*)
I was forging and filing and finishing,
And no whit my labours diminishing
Because, though high up in a chamber
Where none of your kidney may clamber
Your hullabaloo would approach me?
Was it "grammar" wherein you would "coach" me—
You,—pacing in even that paddock
Of language allotted you *ad hoc*,
With a clog at your fetlocks,—you—scorners
Of me free of all its four corners?
Was it "clearness of words which convey thought?"
Ay, if words never needed enswathe aught
But ignorance, impudence, envy
And malice—what word-swathe would then vie
With yours for a clearness crystalline?
But had you to put in one small line
Some thought big and bouncing—as noddle
Of goose, born to cackle and waddle

And bite at man's heel as goose-wont is,
Never felt plague its puny *os frontis*—
You 'd know, as you hissed, spat and sputtered,
Clear cackle is easily uttered!

XXIX.

Lo, I 've laughed out my laugh on this mirth-day!
Beside, at week's end, dawns my birth-day,
That *hebdome, hieron emar*—
(More things in a day than you deem are!)
—*Tei gar Apollona chrusaora*
Egeinato Leto. So, gray or ray
Betide me, six days hence, I 'm vexed here
By no sweep, that 's certain, till next year!
"Vexed?"—roused from what else were insipid ease!
Leave snoring a-bed to Pheidippides!
We 'll up and work! won't we, Euripides?

AT THE "MERMAID"

1876.

The figure that thou here seest . . . Tut!
Was it for gentle Shakespeare put?

B. JONSON. (*Adapted.*)

I.

I—"Next Poet?" No, my hearties,
I nor am nor fain would be!
Choose your chiefs and pick your parties,
Not one soul revolt to me!
I, forsooth, sow song-sedition?
I, a schism in verse provoke?
I, blown up by bard's ambition,
Burst—your bubble-king? You joke.

II.

Come, be grave! The sherris mantling
Still about each mouth, mayhap,
Breeds you insight—just a scantling—
Brings me truth out—just a scrap.

Look and tell me! Written, spoken,
Here 's my life-long work: and where
—Where 's your warrant or my token
I 'm the dead king's son and heir?

III.

Here 's my work: does work discover—
What was rest from work—my life?
Did I live man's hater, lover?
Leave the world at peace, at strife?
Call earth ugliness or beauty?
See things there in large or small?
Use to pay its Lord my duty?
Use to own a lord at all?

IV.

Blank of such a record, truly
Here 's the work I hand, this scroll,
Yours to take or leave; as duly,
Mine remains the unproffered soul.
So much, no whit more, my debtors—
How should one like me lay claim
To that largess elders, betters
Sell you cheap their souls for—fame?

V.

Which of you did I enable
Once to slip inside my breast,
There to catalogue and label
What I like least, what love best,
Hope and fear, believe and doubt of,
Seek and shun, respect—deride?
Who has right to make a rout of
Rarities he found inside?

VI.

Rarities or, as he 'd rather,
Rubbish such as stocks his own:
Need and greed (O strange) the Father
Fashioned not for him alone!
Whence—the comfort set a-strutting,
Whence—the outcry "Haste, behold!
Bard's breast open wide, past shutting,
Shows what brass we took for gold!"

VII.

Friends, I doubt not he 'd display you
Brass—myself call orichalc,—
Furnish much amusement; pray you
Therefore, be content I baulk

Him and you, and bar my portal!
Here 's my work outside: opine
What 's inside me mean and mortal!
Take your pleasure, leave me mine!

VIII.

Which is—not to buy your laurel
As last king did, nothing loth.
Tale adorned and pointed moral
Gained him praise and pity both.
Out rushed sighs and groans by dozens,
Forth by scores oaths, curses flew:
Proving you were cater-cousins,
Kith and kindred, king and you!

IX.

Whereas do I ne'er so little
(Thanks to sherris) leave ajar
Bosom's gate—no jot nor tittle
Grow we nearer than we are.
Sinning, sorrowing, despairing,
Body-ruined, spirit-wrecked,—
Should I give my woes an airing,—
Where 's one plague that claims respect?

X.

Have you found your life distasteful?
My life did, and does, smack sweet.
Was your youth of pleasure wasteful?
Mine I saved and hold complete.
Do your joys with age diminish?
When mine fail me, I 'll complain.
Must in death your daylight finish?
My sun sets to rise again.

XI.

What, like you, he proved—your Pilgrim—
This our world a wilderness,
Earth still grey and heaven still grim,
Not a hand there his might press,
Not a heart his own might throb to,
Men all rogues and women—say,
Dolls which boys' heads duck and bob to,
Grown folk drop or throw away?

XII.

My experience being other,
How should I contribute verse
Worthy of your king and brother?
Balaam-like I bless, not curse.

I find earth not grey but rosy,
Heaven not grim but fair of hue.
Do I stoop? I pluck a posy.
Do I stand and stare? All 's blue.

XIII.

Doubtless I am pushed and shoved by
Rogues and fools enough: the more
Good luck mine, I love, am loved by
Some few honest to the core.
Scan the near high, scout the far low!
"But the low come close:" what then?
Simpletons? My match is Marlowe;
Sciolists? My mate is Ben.

XIV.

Womankind—"the cat-like nature,
False and fickle, vain and weak"—
What of this sad nomenclature
Suits my tongue, if I must speak?
Does the sex invite, repulse so,
Tempt, betray, by fits and starts?
So becalm but to convulse so,
Decking heads and breaking hearts?

XV.

Well may you blaspheme at fortune!
I "threw Venus" (Ben, expound!)
Never did I need importune
Her, of all the Olympian round.
Blessings on my benefactress!
Cursings suit—for aught I know—
Those who twitched her by the back tress,
Tugged and thought to turn her—so!

XVI.

Therefore, since no leg to stand on
Thus I 'm left with,—joy or grief
Be the issue,—I abandon
Hope or care you name me Chief!
Chief and king and Lord 's anointed,
I?—who never once have wished
Death before the day appointed:
Lived and liked, not poohed and pished!

XVII.

"Ah, but so I shall not enter,
Scroll in hand, the common heart—
Stopped at surface: since at centre
Song should reach *Welt-schmerz*, world-smart!"

"Enter in the heart?" Its shelly
Cuirass guard mine, fore and aft!
Such song "enters in the belly
And is cast out in the draught."

XVIII.

Back then to our sherris-brewage!
"Kingship" quotha? I shall wait—
Waive the present time: some new age . . .
But let fools anticipate!
Meanwhile greet me—"friend, good fellow,
Gentle Will," my merry men!
As for making Envy yellow
With "Next Poet"—(Manners, Ben!)

HOUSE.

1876.

I.

SHALL I sonnet-sing you about myself?
Do I live in a house you would like to see?
Is it scant of gear, has it store of pelf?
"Unlock my heart with a sonnet-key?

II.

Invite the world, as my betters have done?
"Take notice: this building remains on view,
Its suites of reception every one,
Its private apartment and bedroom too;

III.

"For a ticket, apply to the Publisher."
No: thanking the public, I must decline.
A peep through my window, if folk prefer;
But, please you, no foot over threshold of mine!

IV.

I have mixed with a crowd and heard free talk
In a foreign land where an earthquake chanced :
And a house stood gaping, nought to baulk
Man's eye wherever he gazed or glanced.

V.

The whole of the frontage shaven sheer,
The inside gaped : exposed to day,
Right and wrong and common and queer,
Bare, as the palm of your hand, it lay.

VI.

The owner? Oh, he had been crushed, no doubt!
"Odd tables and chairs for a man of wealth!
What a parcel of musty old books about!
He smoked,—no wonder he lost his health!

VII.

"I doubt if he bathed before he dressed.
A brasier?—the pagan, he burned perfumes!
You see it is proved, what the neighbours guessed :
His wife and himself had separate rooms."

VIII.

Friends, the goodman of the house at least
Kept house to himself till an earthquake came:
'T is the fall of its frontage permits you feast
On the inside arrangement you praise or blame.

IX.

Outside should suffice for evidence:
And whoso desires to penetrate
Deeper, must dive by the spirit-sense–
No optics like yours, at any rate!

X.

"Hoity toity! A street to explore,
Your house the exception! '*With this same key*
Shakespeare unlocked his heart,' once more!"
Did Shakespeare? If so, the less Shakespeare he!

SHOP.

1876.

I.

So, friend, your shop was all your house!
Its front, astonishing the street,
Invited view from man and mouse
To what diversity of treat
Behind its glass—the single sheet!

II.

What gimcracks, genuine Japanese:
Gape-jaw and goggle-eye, the frog;
Dragons, owls, monkeys, beetles, geese;
Some crush-nosed human-hearted dog:
Queer names, too, such a catalogue!

III.

I thought "And he who owns the wealth
Which blocks the window's vastitude,

—Ah, could I peep at him by stealth
Behind his ware, pass shop, intrude
On house itself, what scenes were viewed!

IV.

"If wide and showy thus the shop,
What must the habitation prove?
The true house with no name a-top—
The mansion, distant one remove,
Once get him off his traffic-groove!

V.

"Pictures he likes, or books perhaps;
And as for buying most and best,
Commend me to these City chaps!
Or else he 's social, takes his rest
On Sundays, with a Lord for guest.

VI.

"Some suburb-palace, parked about
And gated grandly, built last year:
The four-mile walk to keep off gout;
Or big seat sold by bankrupt peer:
But then he takes the rail, that 's clear.

VII.

"Or, stop! I wager, taste selects
Some out o' the way, some all-unknown
Retreat: the neighbourhood suspects
Little that he who rambles lone
Makes Rothschild tremble on his throne!"

VIII.

Nowise! Nor Mayfair residence
Fit to receive and entertain,—
Nor Hampstead villa's kind defence
From noise and crowd, from dust and drain,—
Nor country-box was soul's domain!

IX.

Nowise! At back of all that spread
Of merchandize, woe 's me, I find
A hole i' the wall where, heels by head,
The owner couched, his ware behind,
—In cupboard suited to his mind.

X.

For why? He saw no use of life
But, while he drove a roaring trade,

To chuckle "Customers are rife!"
To chafe "So much hard cash outlaid
Yet zero in my profits made!

XI.

"This novelty costs pains, but—takes?
Cumbers my counter! Stock no more!
This article, no such great shakes,
Fizzes like wildfire? Underscore
The cheap thing—thousands to the fore!"

XII.

'T was lodging best to live most nigh
(Cramp, coffinlike as crib might be)
Receipt of Custom; ear and eye
Wanted no outworld: "Hear and see
The bustle in the shop!" quoth he.

XIII.

My fancy of a merchant-prince
Was different. Through his wares we groped
Our darkling way to—not to mince
The matter—no black den where moped
The master if we interloped!

XIV.

Shop was shop only: household-stuff?
What did he want with comforts there?
"Walls, ceiling, floor, stay blank and rough,
So goods on sale show rich and rare!
'*Sell and scud home*' be shop's affair!"

XV.

What might he deal in? Gems, suppose!
Since somehow business must be done
At cost of trouble,—see, he throws
You choice of jewels, everyone,
Good, better, best, star, moon and sun!

XVI.

Which lies within your power of purse?
This ruby that would tip aright
Solomon's sceptre? Oh, your nurse
Wants simply coral, the delight
Of teething baby,—stuff to bite!

XVII.

Howe'er your choice fell, straight you took
Your purchase, prompt your money rang

On counter,—scarce the man forsook
His study of the "Times," just swang
Till-ward his hand that stopped the clang,—

XVIII.

Then off made buyer with a prize,
Then seller to his "Times" returned
And so did day wear, wear, till eyes
Brightened apace, for rest was earned:
He locked door long ere candle burned.

XIX.

And whither went he? Ask himself,
Not me! To change of scene, I think.
Once sold the ware and pursed the pelf,
Chaffer was scarce his meat and drink,
Nor all his music—money-chink.

XX.

Because a man has shop to mind
In time and place, since flesh must live,
Needs spirit lack all life behind,
All stray thoughts, fancies fugitive,
All loves except what trade can give?

XXI.

I want to know a butcher paints,
A baker rhymes for his pursuit,
Candlestick-maker much acquaints
His soul with song, or, haply mute,
Blows out his brains upon the flute!

XXII.

But—shop each day and all day long!
Friend, your good angel slept, your star
Suffered eclipse, fate did you wrong!
From where these sorts of treasures are,
There should our hearts be—Christ, how far!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. I.

1876.

I.

Over the ball of it,
  Peering and prying,
How I see all of it,
  Life there, outlying!
Roughness and smoothness,
  Shine and defilement,
Grace and uncouthness:
  One reconcilement.

II.

Orbed as appointed,
  Sister with brother
Joins, ne'er disjointed
  One from the other.

All 's lend-and-borrow;
Good, see, wants evil,
Joy demands sorrow,
Angel weds devil!

III.

"Which things must—*why* be?"
Vain our endeavour!
So shall things aye be
As they were ever.
"Such things should *so* be!"
Sage our desistence!
Rough-smooth let globe be,
Mixed—man's existence!

IV.

Man—wise and foolish,
Lover and scorner,
Docile and mulish—
Keep each his corner!
Honey yet gall of it!
There 's the life lying,
And I see all of it,
Only, I 'm dying!

PISGAH-SIGHTS. II.

1876.

I.

COULD I but live again,
  Twice my life over,
Would I once strive again?
  Would not I cover
Quietly all of it—
  Greed and ambition—
So, from the pall of it,
  Pass to fruition?

II.

"Soft!" I 'd say, "Soul mine!
  Three-score and ten years,
Let the blind mole mine
  Digging out deniers!

Let the dazed hawk soar,
  Claim the sun's rights too!
Turf 't is thy walk 's o'er,
  Foliage thy flight 's to."

III.

Only a learner,
  Quick one or slow one,
Just a discerner,
  I would teach no one.
I am earth's native:
  No rearranging it!
I be creative,
  Chopping and changing it?

IV.

March, men, my fellows!
  Those who, above me,
(Distance so mellows)
  Fancy you love me:
Those who, below me,
  (Distance makes great so)
Free to forego me,
  Fancy you hate so!

v.

Praising, reviling,
  Worst head and best head,
Past me defiling,
  Never arrested,
Wanters, abounders,
  March, in gay mixture,
Men, my surrounders!
  I am the fixture.

vi.

So shall I fear thee,
  Mightiness yonder!
Mock-sun—more near thee,
  What is to wonder?
So shall I love thee,
  Down in the dark,—lest
Glowworm I prove thee,
  Star that now sparkiest!

FEARS AND SCRUPLES.

1876.

I.

HERE 's my case. Of old I used to love him
This same unseen friend, before I knew:
Dream there was none like him, none above him,—
Wake to hope and trust my dream was true.

II.

Loved I not his letters full of beauty?
Not his actions famous far and wide?
Absent, he would know I vowed him duty;
Present, he would find me at his side.

III.

Pleasant fancy! for I had but letters,
Only knew of actions by hearsay:
He himself was busied with my betters;
What of that? My turn must come some day.

IV.

"Some day" proving—no day! Here 's the puzzle.
Passed and passed my turn is. Why complain?
He 's so busied! If I could but muzzle
People's foolish mouths that give me pain!

V.

"Letters?" (hear them!) "You a judge of writing?
Ask the experts!—How they shake the head
O'er these characters, your friend's inditing—
Call them forgery from A to Z!

VI.

"Actions? Where 's your certain proof" (they bother)
"He, of all you find so great and good,
He, he only, claims this, that, the other
Action—claimed by men, a multitude?"

VII.

I can simply wish I might refute you,
Wish my friend would,—by a word, a wink,—
Bid me stop that foolish mouth,—you brute you!
He keeps absent,—why, I cannot think.

VIII.

Never mind! Though foolishness may flout me,
One thing 's sure enough: 't is neither frost,
No, nor fire, shall freeze or burn from out me
Thanks for truth—though falsehood, gained—though lost.

IX.

All my days, I 'll go the softlier, sadlier,
For that dream's sake! How forget the thrill
Through and through me as I thought "The gladlier
Lives my friend because I love him still!"

X.

Ah, but there 's a menace someone utters!
"What and if your friend at home play tricks?
Peep at hide-and-seek behind the shutters?
Mean your eyes should pierce through solid bricks?

XI.

"What and if he, frowning, wake you, dreamy?
Lay on you the blame that bricks—conceal?
Say '*At least I saw who did not see me,*
Does see now, and presently shall feel'?"

XII.

"Why, that makes your friend a monster!" say you:
"Had his house no window? At first nod,
Would you not have hailed him?" Hush, I pray you!
What if this friend happen to be—God?

NATURAL MAGIC.

1876.

I.

All I can say is—I saw it!
The room was as bare as your hand.
I locked in the swarth little lady,—I swear,
From the head to the foot of her—well, quite as bare!
"No Nautch shall cheat me," said I, "taking my stand
At this bolt which I draw!" And this bolt—I withdraw it,
And there laughs the lady, not bare, but embowered
With—who knows what verdure, o'erfruited, o'erflowered?
Impossible! Only—I saw it!

II.

All I can sing is—I feel it!
This life was as blank as that room;
I let you pass in here. Precaution, indeed?
Walls, ceiling and floor,—not a chance for a weed!

Wide opens the entrance: where 's cold now, where 's
gloom?
No May to sow seed here, no June to reveal it,
Behold you enshrined in these blooms of your bringing,
These fruits of your bearing—nay, birds of your
winging!
A fairy-tale! Only—I feel it!

MAGICAL NATURE.

1876.

I.

FLOWER—I never fancied, jewel—I profess you!
Bright I see and soft I feel the outside of a flower.
Save but glow inside and—jewel, I should guess you,
Dim to sight and rough to touch: the glory is the dower.

II.

You, forsooth, a flower? Nay, my love, a jewel—
Jewel at no mercy of a moment in your prime!
Time may fray the flower-face: kind be time or cruel,
Jewel, from each facet, flash your laugh at time!

BIFURCATION.

1876.

We were two lovers; let me lie by her,
My tomb beside her tomb. On hers inscribe—
"I loved him; but my reason bade prefer
Duty to love, reject the tempter's bribe
Of rose and lily when each path diverged,
And either I must pace to life's far end
As love should lead me, or, as duty urged,
Plod the worn causeway arm-in-arm with friend.
So, truth turned falsehood: '*How I loathe a flower,*
How prize the pavement!' still caressed his ear—
The deafish friend's—through life's day, hour by hour,
As he laughed (coughing) '*Ay, it would appear!*'
But deep within my heart of hearts there hid
Ever the confidence, amends for all,
That heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey did,
When love from life-long exile comes at call.
Duty and love, one broadway, were the best—
Who doubts? But one or other was to choose.

I chose the darkling half, and wait the rest
In that new world where light and darkness fuse."

Inscribe on mine—"I loved her: love's track lay
O'er sand and pebble, as all travellers know.
Duty led through a smiling country, gay
With greensward where the rose and lily blow.
'*Our roads are diverse: farewell, love!*' said she;
'*'Tis duty I abide by: homely sward*
And not the rock-rough picturesque for me!
Above, where both roads join, I wait reward.
Be you as constant to the path whereon
I leave you planted!' But man needs must move,
Keep moving—whither, when the star is gone
Whereby he steps secure nor strays from love?
No stone but I was tripped by, stumbling-block
But brought me to confusion. Where I fell,
There I lay flat, if moss disguised the rock,
Thence, if flint pierced, I rose and cried '*All's well!*
Duty be mine to tread in that high sphere
Where love from duty ne'er disparts, I trust,
And two halves make that whole, whereof—since here
One must suffice a man—why, this one must!'"

Inscribe each tomb thus: then, some sage acquaint
The simple—which holds sinner, which holds saint!

NUMPHOLEPTOS.

1876.

STILL you stand, still you listen, still you smile!
Still melts your moonbeam through me, white awhile,
Softening, sweetening, till sweet and soft
Increase so round this heart of mine, that oft
I could believe your moonbeam-smile has past
The pallid limit, lies, transformed at last
To sunlight and salvation—warms the soul
It sweetens, softens! Would you pass that goal,
Gain love's birth at the limit's happier verge,
And, where an iridescence lurks, but urge
The hesitating pallor on to prime
Of dawn!—true blood-streaked, sun-warmth, action-time,
By heart-pulse ripened to a ruddy glow
Of gold above my clay—I scarce should know
From gold's self, thus suffused! For gold means love.
What means the sad slow silver smile above
My clay but pity, pardon?—at the best,
But acquiescence that I take my rest,

Contented to be clay, while in your heaven
The sun reserves love for the Spirit-Seven
Companioning God's throne they lamp before,
—Leaves earth a mute waste only wandered o'er
By that pale soft sweet dispassioned moon
Which smiles me slow forgiveness! Such the boon
I beg? Nay, dear, submit to this—just this
Supreme endeavour! As my lips now kiss
Your feet, my arms convulse your shrouding robe,
My eyes, acquainted with the dust, dare probe
Your eyes above for—what, if born, would blind
Mine with redundant bliss, as flash may find
The inert nerve, sting awake the palsied limb,
Bid with life's ecstasy sense overbrim
And suck back death in the resurging joy—
Love, the love whole and sole without alloy!

Vainly! The promise withers! I employ
Lips, arms, eyes, pray the prayer which finds the word,
Make the appeal which must be felt, not heard,
And none the more is changed your calm regard:
Rather, its sweet and soft grow harsh and hard—
Forbearance, then repulsion, then disdain.
Avert the rest! I rise, see!—make, again
Once more, the old departure for some track
Untried yet through a world which brings me back

Ever thus fruitlessly to find your feet,
To fix your eyes, to pray the soft and sweet
Which smile there—take from his new pilgrimage
Your outcast, once your inmate, and assuage
With love—not placid pardon now—his thirst
For a mere drop from out the ocean erst
He drank at! Well, the quest shall be renewed.
Fear nothing! Though I linger, unembued
With any drop, my lips thus close. I go!
So did I leave you, I have found you so,
And doubtlessly, if fated to return,
So shall my pleading persevere and earn
Pardon—not love—in that same smile, I learn,
And lose the meaning of, to learn once more,
Vainly!

What fairy track do I explore?
What magic hall return to, like the gem
Centuply-angled o'er a diadem?
You dwell there, hearted; from your midmost home
Rays forth—through that fantastic world I roam
Ever—from centre to circumference,
Shaft upon coloured shaft: this crimsons thence,
That purples out its precinct through the waste.
Surely I had your sanction when I faced,
Fared forth upon that untried yellow ray

Whence I retrack my steps? They end to-day
Where they began—before your feet, beneath
Your eyes, your smile: the blade is shut in sheath,
Fire quenched in flint; irradiation, late
Triumphant through the distance, finds its fate,
Merged in your blank pure soul, alike the source
And tomb of that prismatic glow: divorce
Absolute, all-conclusive! Forth I fared,
Treading the lambent flamelet: little cared
If now its flickering took the topaz tint,
If now my dull-caked path gave sulphury hint
Of subterranean rage—no stay nor stint
To yellow, since you sanctioned that I bathe,
Burnish me, soul and body, swim and swathe
In yellow license. Here I reek suffused
With crocus, saffron, orange, as I used
With scarlet, purple, every dye o' the bow
Born of the storm-cloud. As before, you show
Scarce recognition, no approval, some
Mistrust, more wonder at a man become
Monstrous in garb, nay—flesh disguised as well,
Through his adventure. Whatsoe'er befell,
I followed, whereso'er it wound, that vein
You authorized should leave your whiteness, stain
Earth's sombre stretch beyond your midmost place
Of vantage,— trode that tinct whereof the trace

On garb and flesh repel you! Yes, I plead
Your own permission—your command, indeed,
That who would worthily retain the love
Must share the knowledge shrined those eyes above,
Go boldly on adventure, break through bounds
O' the quintessential whiteness that surrounds
Your feet, obtain experience of each tinge
That bickers forth to broaden out, impinge
Plainer his foot its pathway all distinct
From every other. Ah, the wonder, linked
With fear, as exploration manifests
What agency it was first tipped the crests
Of unnamed wildflower, soon protruding grew
Portentous mid the sands, as when his hue
Betrays him and the burrowing snake gleams through;
Till, last . . . but why parade more shame and pain?
Are not the proofs upon me? Here again
I pass into your presence, I receive
Your smile of pity, pardon, and I leave . . .
No, not this last of times I leave you, mute,
Submitted to my penance, so my foot
May yet again adventure, tread, from source
To issue, one more ray of rays which course
Each other, at your bidding, from the sphere
Silver and sweet, their birthplace, down that drear
Dark of the world,—you promise shall return

Your pilgrim jewelled as with drops o' the urn
The rainbow paints from, and no smatch at all
Of ghastliness at edge of some cloud-pall
Heaven cowers before, as earth awaits the fall
O' the bolt and flash of doom. Who trusts your word
Tries the adventure: and returns—absurd
As frightful—in that sulphur-steeped disguise
Mocking the priestly cloth-of-gold, sole prize
The arch-heretic was wont to bear away
Until he reached the burning. No, I say:
No fresh adventure! No more seeking love
At end of toil, and finding, calm above
My passion, the old statuesque regard,
The sad petrific smile!

O you—less hard
And hateful than mistaken and obtuse
Unreason of a she-intelligence!
You very woman with the pert pretence
To match the male achievement! Like enough!
Ay, you were easy victors, did the rough
Straightway efface itself to smooth, the gruff
Grind down and grow a whisper,—did man's truth
Subdue, for sake of chivalry and ruth,
Its rapier-edge to suit the bulrush-spear
Womanly falsehood fights with! O that ear

All fact pricks rudely, that thrice-superfine
Feminity of sense, with right divine
To waive all process, take result stain-free
From out the very muck wherein . . .

Ah me!
The true slave's querulous outbreak! All the rest
Be resignation! Forth at your behest
I fare. Who knows but this—the crimson-quest—
May deepen to a sunrise, not decay
To that cold sad sweet smile?—which I obey.

APPEARANCES.

1876

I.

And so you found that poor room dull,
Dark, hardly to your taste, my dear?
Its features seemed unbeautiful:
But this I know—'t was there, not here,
You plighted troth to me, the word
Which—ask that poor room how it heard.

II.

And this rich room obtains your praise
Unqualified,—so bright, so fair,
So all whereat perfection stays?
Ay, but remember—here, not there,
The other word was spoken! Ask
This rich room how you dropped the mask.

ST. MARTIN'S SUMMER.

1876.

I.

No protesting, dearest!
Hardly kisses even!
Don't we both know how it ends?
How the greenest leaf turns serest,
Bluest outbreak – blankest heaven,
Lovers—friends?

II.

You would build a mansion,
I would weave a bower
—Want the heart for enterprise.
Walls admit of no expansion:
Trellis-work may haply flower
Twice the size.

III.

What makes glad Life's Winter?
New buds, old blooms after.
Sad the sighing "How suspect
Beams would ere mid-Autumn splinter,
Rooftree scarce support a rafter,
Walls lie wrecked?"

IV.

You are young, my princess!
I am hardly older:
Yet—I steal a glance behind.
Dare I tell you what convinces
Timid me that you, if bolder,
Bold—are blind?

V.

Where we plan our dwelling
Glooms a graveyard surely!
Headstone, footstone moss may drape,—
Name, date, violets hide from spelling,—
But, though corpses rot obscurely,
Ghosts escape.

VI.

Ghosts! O breathing Beauty,
Give my frank word pardon!
What if I—somehow, somewhere—
Pledged my soul to endless duty
Many a time and oft? Be hard on
Love—laid there?

VII.

Nay, blame grief that 's fickle,
Time that proves a traitor,
Chance, change, all that purpose warps,—
Death who spares to thrust the sickle
Laid Love low, through flowers which later
Shroud the corpse!

VIII.

And you, my winsome lady,
Whisper with like frankness!
Lies nothing buried long ago?
Are yon—which shimmer mid the shady
Where moss and violet run to rankness—
Tombs or no?

IX.

Who taxes you with murder?
My hands are clean—or nearly!
Love being mortal needs must pass.
Repentance? Nothing were absurder.
Enough: we felt Love's loss severely;
Though now—alas!

X.

Love's corpse lies quiet therefore,
Only Love's ghost plays truant,
And warns us have in wholesome awe
Durable mansionry; that 's wherefore
I weave but trellis-work, pursuant
—Life, to law.

XI.

The solid, not the fragile,
Tempts rain and hail and thunder.
If bower stand firm at Autumn's close,
Beyond my hope,—why, boughs were agile;
If bower fall flat, we scarce need wonder
Wreathing—rose!

XII.

So, truce to the protesting,
So, muffled be the kisses!
For, would we but avow the truth,
Sober is genuine joy. No jesting!
Ask else Penelope, Ulysses—
Old in youth!

XIII.

For why should ghosts feel angered?
Let all their interference
Be faint march-music in the air!
"Up! Join the rear of us the vanguard!
Up, lovers, dead to all appearance,
Laggard pair!"

XIV.

The while you clasp me closer,
The while I press you deeper,
As safe we chuckle,—under breath,
Yet all the slyer, the jocoser,—
"So, life can boast its day, like leap-year,
Stolen from death!"

XV.

Ah me—the sudden terror!
Hence quick—avaunt, avoid me,
You cheat, the ghostly flesh-disguised!
Nay, all the ghosts in one! Strange error!
So, 't was Death's self that clipped and coyed me,
Loved—and lied!

XVI.

Ay, dead loves are the potent!
Like any cloud they used you,
Mere semblance you, but substance they!
Build we no mansion, weave we no tent!
Mere flesh—their spirit interfused you!
Hence, I say!

XVII.

All theirs, none yours the glamour!
Theirs each low word that won me,
Soft look that found me Love's, and left
What else but you—the tears and clamour
That 's all your very own! Undone me—
Ghost-bereft!

HERVÉ RIEL.

1876.

I.

On the sea and at the Hogue, sixteen hundred ninety-two,
Did the English fight the French,—woe to France!
And, the thirty-first of May, helter-skelter through the blue,
Like a crowd of frightened porpoises a shoal of sharks pursue,
Came crowding ship on ship to Saint-Malo on the Rance,
With the English fleet in view.

II.

'T was the squadron that escaped, with the victor in full chase;
First and foremost of the drove, in his great ship, Damfreville;
Close on him fled, great and small,
Twenty-two good ships in all;

And they signalled to the place
"Help the winners of a race!
Get us guidance, give us harbour, take us quick—
or, quicker still,
Here 's the English can and will!"

III.

Then the pilots of the place put out brisk and leapt
on board;
"Why, what hope or chance have ships like these
to pass?" laughed they:
"Rocks to starboard, rocks to port, all the passage
scarred and scored,—
Shall the 'Formidable' here, with her twelve and eighty
guns,
Think to make the river-mouth by the single narrow
way,
Trust to enter—where 't is ticklish for a craft of twenty
tons,
And with flow at full beside?
Now, 't is slackest ebb of tide.
Reach the mooring? Rather say,
While rock stands or water runs,
Not a ship will leave the bay!"

IV.

Then was called a council straight.
Brief and bitter the debate:
"Here's the English at our heels; would you have
them take in tow
All that's left us of the fleet, linked together stern
and bow,
For a prize to Plymouth Sound?
Better run the ships aground!"
(Ended Damfreville his speech).
"Not a minute more to wait!
Let the Captains all and each
Shove ashore, then blow up, burn the vessels on
the beach!
France must undergo her fate.

V.

Give the word!" But no such word
Was ever spoke or heard;
For up stood, for out stepped, for in struck amid all
these
—A Captain? A Lieutenant? A Mate—first, second,
third?
No such man of mark, and meet
With his betters to compete!

But a simple Breton sailor pressed by Tourville for the fleet,
A poor coasting-pilot he, Hervé Riel the Croisickese.

VI.

And "What mockery or malice have we here?" cries Hervé Riel:
"Are you mad, you Malouins? Are you cowards, fools, or rogues?
Talk to me of rocks and shoals, me who took the soundings, tell
On my fingers every bank, every shallow, every swell
'Twixt the offing here and Grève where the river disembogues?
Are you bought by English gold? Is it love the lying 's for?
Morn and eve, night and day,
Have I piloted your bay,
Entered free and anchored fast at the foot of Solidor.
Burn the fleet and ruin France? That were worse than fifty Hogues!
Sirs, they know I speak the truth! Sirs, believe me there 's a way!
Only let me lead the line,

Have the biggest ship to steer,
Get this 'Formidable' clear,
Make the others follow mine,
And I lead them, most and least, by a passage I know well,
Right to Solidor past Grève,
And there lay them safe and sound;
And if one ship misbehave,—
—Keel so much as grate the ground,
Why, I 've nothing but my life,—here 's my head!" cries Hervé Riel.

VII.

Not a minute more to wait.
"Steer us in, then, small and great!
Take the helm, lead the line, save the squadron!" cried its chief.
Captains, give the sailor place!
He is Admiral, in brief.
Still the north-wind, by God's grace
See the noble fellow's face
As the big ship, with a bound,
Clears the entry like a hound,
Keeps the passage, as its inch of way were the wide sea's profound!

See, safe thro' shoal and rock,
How they follow in a flock,
Not a ship that misbehaves, not a keel that grates the ground,
Not a spar that comes to grief!
The peril, see, is past.
All are harboured to the last,
And just as Hervé Riel hollas "Anchor!"—sure as fate,
Up the English come,—too late!

VIII.

So, the storm subsides to calm:
They see the green trees wave
On the heights o'erlooking Grève.
Hearts that bled are stanched with balm.
"Just our rapture to enhance,
Let the English rake the bay,
Gnash their teeth and glare askance
As they cannonade away!
'Neath rampired Solidor pleasant riding on the Rance!"
How hope succeeds despair on each Captain's countenance!
Out burst all with one accord,
"This is Paradise for Hell!

Let France, let France's King
Thank the man that did the thing!"
What a shout, and all one word,
"Hervé Riel!"
As he stepped in front once more,
Not a symptom of surprise
In the frank blue Breton eyes,
Just the same man as before.

IX.

Then said Damfreville, "My friend,
I must speak out at the end,
Though I find the speaking hard.
Praise is deeper than the lips:
You have saved the King his ships,
You must name your own reward.
'Faith, our sun was near eclipse!
Demand whate'er you will,
France remains your debtor still.
Ask to heart's content and have! or my name's not Damfreville."

X.

Then a beam of fun outbroke
On the bearded mouth that spoke,

As the honest heart laughed through
Those frank eyes of Breton blue:
"Since I needs must say my say,
Since on board the duty's done,
And from Malo Roads to Croisic Point, what is it but a run?—
Since 't is ask and have, I may—
Since the others go ashore—
Come! A good whole holiday!
Leave to go and see my wife, whom I call the Belle Aurore!"
That he asked and that he got,—nothing more.

XI.

Name and deed alike are lost:
Not a pillar nor a post
In his Croisic keeps alive the feat as it befell;
Not a head in white and black
On a single fishing-smack,
In memory of the man but for whom had gone to wrack
All that France saved from the fight whence England bore the bell.
Go to Paris: rank on rank
Search the heroes flung pell-mell
On the Louvre, face and flank!

You shall look long enough ere you come to Hervé Riel.
So, for better and for worse,
Hervé Riel, accept my verse!
In my verse, Hervé Riel, do thou once more
Save the squadron, honour France, love thy wife the Belle Aurore!

A FORGIVENESS.

1876.

I AM indeed the personage you know.
As for my wife,—what happened long ago,—
You have a right to question me, as I
Am bound to answer.

("Son, a fit reply!"
The monk half spoke, half ground through his clenched teeth,
At the confession-grate I knelt beneath.)

Thus then all happened, Father! Power and place
I had as still I have. I ran life's race,
With the whole world to see, as only strains
His strength some athlete whose prodigious gains
Of good appal him: happy to excess,—
Work freely done should balance happiness

Fully enjoyed; and, since beneath my roof
Housed she who made home heaven, in heaven's behoof
I went forth every day, and all day long
Worked for the world. Look, how the labourer's song
Cheers him! Thus sang my soul, at each sharp throe
Of labouring flesh and blood—"She loves me so!"

One day, perhaps such song so knit the nerve
That work grew play and vanished. "I deserve
Haply my heaven an hour before the time!"
I laughed, as silverly the clockhouse-chime
Surprised me passing through the postern-gate
—Not the main entry where the menials wait
And wonder why the world's affairs allow
The master sudden leisure. That was how
I took the private garden-way for once.

Forth from the alcove, I saw start, ensconce
Himself behind the porphyry vase, a man.

My fancies in the natural order ran:
"A spy,—perhaps a foe in ambuscade,—
A thief,—more like, a sweetheart of some maid
Who pitched on the alcove for tryst perhaps."

"Stand there!" I bid.

Whereat my man but wraps
His face the closelier with uplifted arm
Whereon the cloak lies, strikes in blind alarm
This and that pedestal as,—stretch and stoop,—
Now in, now out of sight, he thrids the group
Of statues, marble god and goddess ranged
Each side the pathway, till the gate 's exchanged
For safety: one step thence, the street, you know!

Thus far I followed with my gaze. Then, slow,
Near on admiringly, I breathed again,
And—back to that last fancy of the train—
"A danger risked for hope of just a word
With—which of all my nest may be the bird
This poacher covets for her plumage, pray?
Carmen? Juana? Carmen seems too gay
For such adventure, while Juana 's grave
—Would scorn the folly. I applaud the knave!
He had the eye, could single from my brood
His proper fledgeling!"

As I turned, there stood
In face of me, my wife stone-still stone-white.
Whether one bound had brought her,—at first sight
Of what she judged the encounter, sure to be

Next moment, of the venturous man and me,—
Brought her to clutch and keep me from my prey:
Whether impelled because her death no day
Could come so absolutely opportune
As now at joy's height, like a year in June
Stayed at the fall of its first ripened rose:
Or whether hungry for my hate—who knows?—
Eager to end an irksome lie, and taste
Our tingling true relation, hate embraced
By hate one naked moment:—anyhow
There stone-still stone-white stood my wife, but now
The woman who made heaven within my house.
Ay, she who faced me was my very spouse
As well as love—you are to recollect!

"Stay!" she said. "Keep at least one soul unspecked
With crime, that 's spotless hitherto—your own!
Kill me who court the blessing, who alone
Was, am, and shall be guilty, first to last!
The man lay helpless in the toils I cast
About him, helpless as the statue there
Against that strangling bell-flower's bondage: tear
Away and tread to dust the parasite,
But do the passive marble no despite!
I love him as I hate you. Kill me! Strike
At one blow both infinitudes alike

Out of existence—hate and love! Whence love?
That 's safe inside my heart, nor will remove
For any searching of your steel, I think.
Whence hate? The secret lay on lip, at brink
Of speech, in one fierce tremble to escape,
At every form wherein your love took shape,
At each new provocation of your kiss.
Kill me!"

We went in.

Next day after this,
I felt as if the speech might come. I spoke—
Easily, after all.

"The lifted cloak
Was screen sufficient: I concern myself
Hardly with laying hands on who for pelf—
Whate'er the ignoble kind—may prowl and brave
Cuffing and kicking proper to a knave
Detected by my household's vigilance.
Enough of such! As for my love-romance—
I, like our good Hidalgo, rub my eyes
And wake and wonder how the film could rise
Which changed for me a barber's basin straight
Into—Mambrino's helm? I hesitate
Nowise to say—God's sacramental cup!

Why should I blame the brass which, burnished up,
Will blaze, to all but me, as good as gold?
To me—a warning I was overbold
In judging metals. The Hidalgo waked
Only to die, if I remember,—staked
His life upon the basin's worth, and lost:
While I confess torpidity at most
In here and there a limb; but, lame and halt,
Still should I work on, still repair my fault
Ere I took rest in death,—no fear at all!
Now, work—no word before the curtain fall!"

The "curtain"? That of death on life, I meant:
My "word," permissible in death's event,
Would be—truth, soul to soul; for, otherwise,
Day by day, three years long, there had to rise
And, night by night, to fall upon our stage—
Ours, doomed to public play by heritage—
Another curtain, when the world, perforce
Our critical assembly, in due course
Came and went, witnessing, gave praise or blame
To art-mimetic. It had spoiled the game
If, suffered to set foot behind our scene,
The world had witnessed how stage-king and queen,
Gallant and lady, but a minute since
Enarming each the other, would evince

No sign of recognition as they took
His way and her way to whatever nook
Waited them in the darkness either side
Of that bright stage where lately groom and bride
Had fired the audience to a frenzy-fit
Of sympathetic rapture—every whit
Earned as the curtain fell on her and me,
—Actors. Three whole years, nothing was to see
But calm and concord; where a speech was due
There came the speech: when smiles were wanted too
Smiles were as ready. In a place like mine,
Where foreign and domestic cares combine,
There 's audience every day and all day long;
But finally the last of the whole throng
Who linger lets one see his back. For her—
Why, liberty and liking: I aver,
Liking and liberty! For me—I breathed,
Let my face rest from every wrinkle wreathed
Smile-like about the mouth, unlearned my task
Of personation till next day bade mask,
And quietly betook me from that world
To the real world, not pageant: there unfurled
In work, its wings, my soul, the fretted power.
Three years I worked, each minute of each hour
Not claimed by acting:—work I may dispense
With talk about, since work in evidence.

Perhaps in history; who knows or cares?

After three years, this way, all unawares,
Our acting ended. She and I, at close
Of a loud night-feast, led, between two rows
Of bending male and female loyalty,
Our lord the king down staircase, while, held high
At arm's length did the twisted tapers' flare
Herald his passage from our palace, where
Such visiting left glory evermore.
Again the ascent in public, till at door
As we two stood by the saloon—now blank
And disencumbered of its guests—there sank
A whisper in my ear, so low and yet
So unmistakable!

"I half forget
The chamber you repair to, and I want
Occasion for one short word—if you grant
That grace—within a certain room you called
Our 'Study,' for you wrote there while I scrawled
Some paper full of faces for my sport.
That room I can remember. Just one short
Word with you there, for the remembrance' sake!"

"Follow me thither!" I replied.

We break
The gloom a little, as with guiding lamp
I lead the way, leave warmth and cheer, by damp
Blind disused serpentining ways afar
From where the habitable chambers are,—
Ascend, descend stairs tunnelled through the stone,—
Always in silence,—till I reach the lone
Chamber sepulchred for my very own
Out of the palace-quarry. When a boy,
Here was my fortress, stronghold from annoy,
Proof-positive of ownership; in youth
I garnered up my gleanings here—uncouth
But precious relics of vain hopes, vain fears;
Finally, this became in after years
My closet of entrenchment to withstand
Invasion of the foe on every hand—
The multifarious herd in bower and hall,
State-room,—rooms whatsoe'er the style, which call
On masters to be mindful that, before
Men, they must look like men and something more.
Here,—when our lord the king's bestowment ceased
To deck me on the day that, golden-fleeced,
I touched ambition's height,—'t was here, released
From glory (always symbolled by a chain!)
No sooner was I privileged to gain
My secret domicile than glad I flung

That last toy on the table—gazed where hung
On hook my father's gift, the arquebuss—
And asked myself "Shall I envisage thus
The new prize and the old prize, when I reach
Another year's experience?—own that each
Equalled advantage—sportsman's—statesman's tool?
That brought me down an eagle, this—a fool!"

Into which room on entry, I set down
The lamp, and turning saw whose rustled gown
Had told me my wife followed, pace for pace.
Each of us looked the other in the face.
She spoke. "Since I could die now . . ."

(To explain
Why that first struck me, know—not once again
Since the adventure at the porphyry's edge
Three years before, which sundered like a wedge
Her soul from mine,—though daily, smile to smile,
We stood before the public,—all the while
Not once had I distinguished, in that face
I paid observance to, the faintest trace
Of feature more than requisite for eyes
To do their duty by and recognize:
So did I force mine to obey my will
And pry no further. There exists such skill,—

Those know who need it. What physician shrinks
From needful contact with a corpse? He drinks
No plague so long as thirst for knowledge—not
An idler impulse—prompts inquiry. What,
And will you disbelieve in power to bid
Our spirit back to bounds, as though we chid
A child from scrutiny that 's just and right
In manhood? Sense, not soul, accomplished
sight,
Reported daily she it was—not how
Nor why a change had come to cheek and brow.)

"Since I could die now of the truth concealed,
Yet dare not, must not die—so seems revealed
The Virgin's mind to me—for death means peace,
Wherein no lawful part have I, whose lease
Of life and punishment the truth avowed
May haply lengthen,—let me push the shroud
Away, that steals to muffle ere is just
My penance-fire in snow! I dare—I must
Live, by avowal of the truth—this truth—
I loved you! Thanks for the fresh serpent's tooth
That, by a prompt new pang more exquisite
Than all preceding torture, proves me right!
I loved you yet I lost you! May I go
Burn to the ashes, now my shame you know?"

I think there never was such—how express?—
Horror coquetting with voluptuousness,
As in those arms of Eastern workmanship—
Yataghan, kandjar, things that rend and rip,
Gash rough, slash smooth, help hate so many ways,
Yet ever keep a beauty that betrays
Love still at work with the artificer
Throughout his quaint devising. Why prefer,
Except for love's sake, that a blade should writhe
And bicker like a flame?—now play the scythe
As if some broad neck tempted,—now contract
And needle off into a fineness lacked
For just that puncture which the heart demands?
Then, such adornment! Wherefore need our hands
Enclose not ivory alone, nor gold
Roughened for use, but jewels? Nay, behold!
Fancy my favourite—which I seem to grasp
While I describe the luxury. No asp
Is diapered more delicate round throat
Than this below the handle! These denote
—These mazy lines meandering, to end
Only in flesh they open—what intend
They else but water-purlings—pale contrast
With the life-crimson where they blend at last?
And mark the handle's dim pellucid green,
Carved, the hard jadestone, as you pinch a bean,

Into a sort of parrot-bird! He pecks
A grape-bunch; his two eyes are ruby-specks
Pure from the mine: seen this way,—glassy blank,
But turn them,—lo the inmost fire, that shrank
From sparkling, sends a red dart right to aim!
Why did I choose such toys? Perhaps the game
Of peaceful men is warlike, just as men
War-wearied get amusement from that pen
And paper we grow sick of—statesfolk tired
Of merely (when such measures are required)
Dealing out doom to people by three words,
A signature and seal: we play with swords
Suggestive of quick process. That is how
I came to like the toys described you now,
Store of which glittered on the walls and strewed
The table, even, while my wife pursued
Her purpose to its ending. "Now you know
This shame, my three years' torture, let me go,
Burn to the very ashes! You—I lost,
Yet you—I loved!"

The thing I pity most
In men is – action prompted by surprise
Of anger: men? nay, bulls —whose onset lies
At instance of the firework and the goad!
Once the foe prostrate,—trampling once bestowed,—

Prompt follows placability, regret,
Atonement. Trust me, blood-warmth never yet
Betokened strong will! As no leap of pulse
Pricked me, that first time, so did none convulse
My veins at this occasion for resolve.
Had that devolved which did not then devolve
Upon me, I had done—what now to do
Was quietly apparent.

"Tell me who
The man was, crouching by the porphyry vase!"

"No, never! All was folly in his case,
All guilt in mine. I tempted, he complied."

"And yet you loved me?"

"Loved you. Double-dyed
In folly and in guilt, I thought you gave
Your heart and soul away from me to slave
At statecraft. Since my right in you seemed lost,
I stung myself to teach you, to your cost,
What you rejected could be prized beyond
Life, heaven, by the first fool I threw a fond
Look on, a fatal word to."

"And you still
Love me? Do I conjecture well or ill?"

"Conjecture—well or ill! I had three years
To spend in learning you."

"We both are peers
In knowledge, therefore: since three years are spent
Ere thus much of yourself *I* learn—who went
Back to the house, that day, and brought my mind
To bear upon your action, uncombined
Motive from motive, till the dross, deprived
Of every purer particle, survived
At last in native simple hideousness,
Utter contemptibility, nor less
Nor more. Contemptibility—exempt
How could I, from its proper due—contempt?
I have too much despised you to divert
My life from its set course by help or hurt
Of your all-despicable life—perturb
The calm, I work in, by—men's mouths to curb,
Which at such news were clamorous enough—
Men's eyes to shut before my broidered stuff
With the huge hole there, my emblazoned wall
Blank where a scutcheon hung,—by, worse than all,
Each day's procession, my paraded life

Robbed and impoverished through the wanting wife
—Now that my life (which means—my work) was grown
Riches indeed! Once, just this worth alone
Seemed work to have, that profit gained thereby
Of good and praise would—how rewardingly!—
Fall at your feet,—a crown I hoped to cast
Before your love, my love should crown at last.
No love remaining to cast crown before,
My love stopped work now: but contempt the more
Impelled me task as ever head and hand,
Because the very fiends weave ropes of sand
Rather than taste pure hell in idleness.
Therefore I kept my memory down by stress
Of daily work I had no mind to stay
For the world's wonder at the wife away.
Oh, it was easy all of it, believe,
For I despised you! But your words retrieve
Importantly the past. No hate assumed
The mask of love at any time! There gloomed
A moment when love took hate's semblance, urged
By causes you declare; but love's self purged
Away a fancied wrong I did both loves
—Yours and my own: by no hate's help, it proves,
Purgation was attempted. Then, you rise
High by how many a grade! I did despise—
I do but hate you. Let hate's punishment

Replace contempt's! First step to which ascent—
Write down your own words I re-utter you!
'*I loved my husband and I hated—who*
He was, I took up as my first chance, mere
Mud-ball to fling and make love foul with!' Here
Lies paper!"

"Would my blood for ink suffice!"

"It may: this minion from a land of spice,
Silk, feather—every bird of jewelled breast—
This poignard's beauty, ne'er so lightly prest
Above your heart there . . ."

"Thus?"

"It flows, I see.
Dip there the point and write!"

"Dictate to me!
Nay, I remember."

And she wrote the words.
I read them. Then—"Since love, in you, affords
License for hate, in me, to quench (I say)
Contempt—why, hate itself has passed away

In vengeance—foreign to contempt. Depart
Peacefully to that death which Eastern art
Imbued this weapon with, if tales be true!
Love will succeed to hate. I pardon you—
Dead in our chamber!"

True as truth the tale.
She died ere morning; then, I saw how pale
Her cheek was ere it wore day's paint-disguise,
And what a hollow darkened 'neath her eyes,
Now that I used my own. She sleeps, as erst
Beloved, in this your church: ay, yours!

Immersed
In thought so deeply, Father? Sad, perhaps?
For whose sake, hers or mine or his who wraps
—Still plain I seem to see!—about his head
The idle cloak,—about his heart (instead
Of cuirass) some fond hope he may elude
My vengeance in the cloister's solitude?
Hardly, I think! As little helped his brow
The cloak then, Father—as your grate helps now!

CENCIAJA.

1876.

Ogni cencio vuol entrare in bucato.—*Italian Proverb.*

May I print, Shelley, how it came to pass
That when your Beatrice seemed—by lapse
Of many a long month since her sentence fell—
Assured of pardon for the parricide,—
By intercession of staunch friends, or, say,
By certain pricks of conscience in the Pope
Conniver at Francesco Cenci's guilt,—
Suddenly all things changed and Clement grew
"Stern," as you state, "nor to be moved nor bent,
But said these three words coldly '*She must die*,'
Subjoining '*Pardon? Paolo Santa Croce*
Murdered his mother also yestereve,
And he is fled: she shall not flee at least!'
—So, to the letter, sentence was fulfilled?
Shelley, may I condense verbosity
That lies before me, into some few words
Of English, and illustrate your superb

Achievement by a rescued anecdote,
No great things, only new and true beside?
As if some mere familiar of a house
Should venture to accost the group at gaze
Before its Titian, famed the wide world through,
And supplement such pictured masterpiece
By whisper "Searching in the archives here,
I found the reason of the Lady's fate,
And how by accident it came to pass
She wears the halo and displays the palm:
Who, haply, else had never suffered—no,
Nor graced our gallery, by consequence."
Who loved the work would like the little news:
Who lauds your poem lends an ear to me
Relating how the penalty was paid
By one Marchese dell' Oriolo, called
Onofrio Santa Croce otherwise,
For his complicity in matricide
With Paolo his own brother,—he whose crime
And flight induced "those three words—She must die."
Thus I unroll you then the manuscript.

"God's justice"—(of the multiplicity
Of such communications extant still,
Recording, each, injustice done by God
In person of his Vicar-upon-earth,

Scarce one but leads off to the self-same tune)—
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never on the track until it reach
Delinquency. In proof I cite the case
Of Paolo Santa Croce."

Many times
The youngster,—having been importunate
That Marchesine Costanza, who remained
His widowed mother, should supplant the heir
Her elder son, and substitute himself
In sole possession of her faculty,—
And meeting just as often with rebuff,—
Blinded by so exorbitant a lust
Of gold, the youngster straightway tasked his wits,
Casting about to kill the lady—thus.

He first, to cover his iniquity,
Writes to Onofrio Santa Croce, then
Authoritative lord, acquainting him
Their mother was contamination—wrought
Like hell-fire in the beauty of their House
By dissoluteness and abandonment
Of soul and body to impure delight.
Moreover, since she suffered from disease,
Those symptoms which her death made manifest

Hydroptic, he affirmed were fruits of sin
About to bring confusion and disgrace
Upon the ancient lineage and high fame
O' the family, when published. Duty bound,
He asked his brother—what a son should do?

Which when Marchese dell' Oriolo heard
By letter, being absent at his land
Oriolo, he made answer, this, no more:
"It must behove a son,—things haply so,—
To act as honour prompts a cavalier
And son, perform his duty to all three,
Mother and brothers"—here advice broke off.

By which advice informed and fortified,
As he professed himself—since bound by birth
To hear God's voice in primogeniture—
Paolo, who kept his mother company
In her domain Subiaco, straightway dared
His whole enormity of enterprise
And, falling on her, stabbed the lady dead;
Whose death demonstrated her innocence,
And happened,—by the way,—since Jesus Christ
Died to save man, just sixteen hundred years.
Costanza was of aspect beautiful
Exceedingly, and seemed, although in age

Sixty about, to far surpass her peers
The coëtaneous dames, in youth and grace.

Done the misdeed, its author takes to flight,
Foiling thereby the justice of the world:
Not God's however,—God, be sure, knows well
The way to clutch a culprit. Witness here!
The present sinner, when he least expects,
Snug-cornered somewhere i' the Basilicate,
Stumbles upon his death by violence.
A man of blood assaults a man of blood
And slays him somehow. This was afterward:
Enough, he promptly met with his deserts,
And, ending thus, permits we end with him,
And push forthwith to this important point—
His matricide fell out, of all the days,
Precisely when the law-procedure closed
Respecting Count Francesco Cenci's death
Chargeable on his daughter, sons and wife.
"Thus patricide was matched with matricide,"
A poet not inelegantly rhymed:
Nay, fratricide—those Princes Massimi!—
Which so disturbed the spirit of the Pope
That all the likelihood Rome entertained
Of Beatrice's pardon vanished straight,
And she endured the piteous death.

Now see
The sequel—what effect commandment had
For strict inquiry into this last case,
When Cardinal Aldobrandini (great
His efficacy—nephew to the Pope)
Was bidden crush—ay, though his very hand
Got soil i' the act—crime spawning everywhere!
Because, when all endeavour had been used
To catch the aforesaid Paolo, all in vain—
"Make perquisition" quoth our Eminence,
"Throughout his now deserted domicile!
Ransack the palace, roof and floor, to find
If haply any scrap of writing, hid
In nook or corner, may convict—who knows?—
Brother Onofrio of intelligence
With brother Paolo, as in brotherhood
Is but too likely: crime spawns everywhere."

And, every cranny searched accordingly,
There comes to light—O lynx-eyed Cardinal!—
Onofrio's unconsidered writing-scrap,
The letter in reply to Paolo's prayer,
The word of counsel that—things proving so,
Paolo should act the proper knightly part,
And do as was incumbent on a son,
A brother—and a man of birth, be sure!

Whereat immediately the officers
Proceeded to arrest Onofrio—found
At foot-ball, child's play, unaware of harm,
Safe with his friends, the Orsini, at their seat
Monte Giordano; as he left the house
He came upon the watch in wait for him
Set by the Barigel,—was caught and caged.

News of which capture being, that same hour,
Conveyed to Rome, forthwith our Eminence
Commands Taverna, Governor and Judge,
To have the process in especial care,
Be, first to last, not only president
In person, but inquisitor as well,
Nor trust the by-work to a substitute:
Bids him not, squeamish, keep the bench, but scrub
The floor of Justice, so to speak,—go try
His best in prison with the criminal:
Promising, as reward for by-work done
Fairly on all-fours, that, success obtained
And crime avowed, or such connivency
With crime as should procure a decent death—
Himself will humbly beg—which means, procure—
The Hat and Purple from his relative
The Pope, and so repay a diligence
Which, meritorious in the Cenci-case,

Mounts plainly here to Purple and the Hat.

Whereupon did my lord the Governor
So masterfully exercise the task
Enjoined him, that he, day by day, and week
By week, and month by month, from first to last
Toiled for the prize: now, punctual at his place,
Played Judge, and now, assiduous at his post,
Inquisitor—pressed cushion and scoured plank,
Early and late. Noon's fervour and night's chill,
Nought moved whom morn would, purpling, make amends!
So that observers laughed as, many a day,
He left home, in July when day is flame,
Posted to Tordinona-prison, plunged
Into a vault where daylong night is ice,
There passed his eight hours on a stretch, content,
Examining Onofrio: all the stress
Of all examination steadily
Converging into one pin-point,—he pushed
Tentative now of head and now of heart.
As when the nuthatch taps and tries the nut
This side and that side till the kernel sound,—
So did he press the sole and single point
—What was the very meaning of the phrase
'*Do as beseems an honoured cavalier*'?

Which one persistent question-torture,—plied
Day by day, week by week, and month by month,
Morn, noon and night,—fatigued away a mind
Grown imbecile by darkness, solitude,
And one vivacious memory gnawing there
As when a corpse is coffined with a snake:
—Fatigued Onofrio into what might seem
Admission that perchance his judgment groped
So blindly, feeling for an issue—aught
With semblance of an issue from the toils
Cast of a sudden round feet late so free,
He possibly might have envisaged, scarce
Recoiled from—even were the issue death
—Even her death whose life was death and worse!
Always provided that the charge of crime,
Each jot and tittle of the charge were true.
In such a sense, belike, he might advise
His brother to expurgate crime with . . . well,
With blood, if blood must follow on '*the course*
Taken as might beseem a cavalier.'

Whereupon process ended, and report
Was made without a minute of delay
To Clement who, because of those two crimes
O' the Massimi and Cenci flagrant late,
Must needs impatiently desire result

Result obtained, he bade the Governor
Summon the Congregation and despatch.
Summons made, sentence passed accordingly
—Death by beheading. When his death-decree
Was intimated to Onofrio, all
Man could do—that did he to save himself.
'T was much, the having gained for his defence
The Advocate o' the Poor, with natural help
Of many noble friendly persons fain
To disengage a man of family,
So young too, from his grim entanglement:
But Cardinal Aldobrandini ruled
There must be no diversion of the law.
Justice is justice, and the magistrate
Bears not the sword in vain. Who sins must die.

So, the Marchese had his head cut off,
With Rome to see, a concourse infinite,
In Place Saint Angelo beside the Bridge:
Where, demonstrating magnanimity
Adequate to his birth and breed,—poor boy!—
He made the people the accustomed speech,
Exhorted them to true faith, honest works,
And special good behaviour as regards
A parent of no matter what the sex,
Bidding each son take warning from himself.

Truly, it was considered in the boy
Stark staring lunacy, no less, to snap
So plain a bait, be hooked and hauled ashore
By such an angler as the Cardinal!
Why make confession of his privity
To Paolo's enterprise? Mere sealing lips—
Or, better, saying "When I counselled him
'*To do as might beseem a cavalier*,'
What could I mean but '*Hide our parent's shame*
As Christian ought, by aid of Holy Church!
Bury it in a convent—ay, beneath
Enough dotation to prevent its ghost
From troubling earth!'" Mere saying thus,—'t is plain,
Not only were his life the recompense,
But he had manifestly proved himself
True Christian, and in lieu of punishment
Got praise of all men. So the populace.

Anyhow, when the Pope made promise good
(That of Aldobrandini, near and dear)
And gave Taverna, who had toiled so much,
A Cardinal's equipment, some such word
As this from mouth to ear went saucily:
"Taverna's cap is dyed in what he drew
From Santa Croce's veins!" So joked the world.

I add: Onofrio left one child behind,
A daughter named Valeria, dowered with grace
Abundantly of soul and body, doomed
To life the shorter for her father's fate.
By death of her, the Marquisate returned
To that Orsini House from whence it came:
Oriolo having passed as donative
To Santa Croce from their ancestors.

And no word more? By all means! Would you know
The authoritative answer, when folk urged
"What made Aldobrandini, hound-like staunch,
Hunt out of life a harmless simpleton?"
The answer was—"Hatred implacable,
By reason they were rivals in their love."
The Cardinal's desire was to a dame
Whose favour was Onofrio's. Pricked with pride,
The simpleton must ostentatiously
Display a ring, the Cardinal's love-gift,
Given to Onofrio as the lady's gage;
Which ring on finger, as he put forth hand
To draw a tapestry, the Cardinal
Saw and knew, gift and owner, old and young;
Whereon a fury entered him — the fire
He quenched with what could quench fire only—blood.

Nay, more: "there want not who affirm to boot,
The unwise boy, a certain festal eve,
Feigned ignorance of who the wight might be
That pressed too closely on him with a crowd.
He struck the Cardinal a blow: and then,
To put a face upon the incident,
Dared next day, smug as ever, go pay court
I' the Cardinal's antechamber. Mark and mend,
Ye youth, by this example how may greed
Vainglorious operate in worldly souls!"

So ends the chronicler, beginning with
"God's justice, tardy though it prove perchance,
Rests never till it reach delinquency."
Ay, or how otherwise had come to pass
That Victor rules, this present year, in Rome?

FILIPPO BALDINUCCI ON THE PRIVILEGE OF BURIAL.

A REMINISCENCE OF A.D. 1676.

1876.

I.

"No, boy, we must not"—so began
My Uncle (he 's with God long since)
A-petting me, the good old man!
"We must not"—and he seemed to wince,
And lost that laugh whereto had grown
His chuckle at my piece of news,
How cleverly I aimed my stone—
"I fear we must not pelt the Jews!

II.

"When I was young indeed,—ah, faith
Was young and strong in Florence too!
We Christians never dreamed of scathe
Because we cursed or kicked the crew.

But now—well, well! The olive-crops
Weighed double then, and Arno's pranks
Would always spare religious shops
Whenever he o'erflowed his banks!

III.

"I 'll tell you"—and his eye regained
Its twinkle—"tell you something choice!
Something may help you keep unstained
Your honest zeal to stop the voice
Of unbelief with stone-throw -spite
Of laws, which modern fools enact,
That we must suffer Jews in sight
Go wholly unmolested! Fact!

IV.

"There was, then, in my youth, and yet
Is, by our San Frediano, just
Below the Blessed Olivet,
A wayside ground wherein they thrust
Their dead,—these Jews,—the more our shame!
Except that, so they will but die,
Christians perchance incur no blame
In giving hogs a hoist to stye.

V.

"There, anyhow, Jews stow away
Their dead; and,—such their insolence,—
Slink at odd times to sing and pray
As Christians do—all make-pretence!—
Which wickedness they perpetrate
Because they think no Christians see.
They reckoned here, at any rate,
Without their host: ha, ha, he, he!

VI.

"For, what should join their plot of ground
But a good Farmer's Christian field?
The Jews had hedged their corner round
With bramble-bush to keep concealed
Their doings: for the public road
Ran betwixt this their ground and that
The Farmer's, where he ploughed and sowed,
Grew corn for barn and grapes for vat.

VII.

"So, properly to guard his store
And gall the unbelievers too,
He builds a shrine and, what is more,
Procures a painter whom I knew,

One Buti (he 's with God) to paint
A holy picture there—no less
Than Virgin Mary free from taint
Borne to the sky by angels: yes!

VIII.

"Which shrine he fixed,—who says him nay?—
A-facing with its picture-side
Not, as you 'd think, the public way,
But just where sought these hounds to hide
Their carrion from that very truth
Of Mary's triumph: not a hound
Could act his mummeries uncouth
But Mary shamed the pack all round!

IX.

"Now, if it was amusing, judge!
—To see the company arrive,
Each Jew intent to end his trudge
And take his pleasure (though alive)
With all his Jewish kith and kin
Below ground, have his venom out,
Sharpen his wits for next day's sin,
Curse Christians, and so home, no doubt!

X.

"Whereas, each phyz upturned beholds
Mary, I warrant, soaring brave!
And in a trice, beneath the folds
Of filthy garb which gowns each knave,
Down drops it—there to hide grimace,
Contortion of the mouth and nose
At finding Mary in the place
They 'd keep for Pilate, I suppose!

XI.

"At last, they will not brook—not they!—
Longer such outrage on their tribe:
So, in some hole and corner, lay
Their heads together—how to bribe
The meritorious Farmer's self
To straight undo his work, restore
Their chance to meet and muse on pelf—
Pretending sorrow, as before!

XII.

"Forthwith, a posse, if you please,
Of Rabbi This and Rabbi That
Almost go down upon their knees
To get him lay the picture flat.

The spokesman, eighty years of age,
Grey as a badger, with a goat's
Not only beard but bleat, 'gins wage
War with our Mary. Thus he dotes:—

XIII.

"'Friends, grant a grace! How Hebrews toil
Through life in Florence—why relate
To those who lay the burden, spoil
Our paths of peace? We bear our fate.
But when with life the long toil ends,
Why must you—the expression craves
Pardon, but truth compels me, friends!—
Why must you plague us in our graves?

XIV.

"'Thoughtlessly plague, I would believe!
For how can you—the lords of ease
By nurture, birthright—e'en conceive
Our luxury to lie with trees
And turf,—the cricket and the bird
Left for our last companionship:
No harsh deed, no unkindly word,
No frowning brow nor scornful lip!

XV.

"'*Death's luxury, we now rehearse*
While, living, through your streets we fare
And take your hatred: nothing worse
Have we, once dead and safe, to bear!
So we refresh our souls, fulfil
Our works, our daily tasks; and thus
Gather you grain—earth's harvest—still
The wheat for you, the straw for us.

XVI.

"''What flouting in a face, what harm,
In just a lady borne from bier
By boys' heads, wings for leg and arm?'
You question. Friends, the harm is here—
That just when our last sigh is heaved,
And we would fain thank God and you
For labour done and peace achieved,
Back comes the Past in full review!

XVII.

"'*At sight of just that simple flag,*
Starts the foe-feeling serpent-like
From slumber. Leave it lulled, nor drag—
Though fangless—forth, what needs must strike

When stricken sore, though stroke be vain
Against the mailed oppressor! Give
Play to our fancy that we gain
Life's rights when once we cease to live!

XVIII.

"'*Thus much to courtesy, to kind,*
To conscience! Now to Florence folk!
There's core beneath this apple-rind,
Beneath this white-of-egg there's yolk!
Beneath this prayer to courtesy,
Kind, conscience—there's a sum to pouch!
How many ducats down will buy
Our shame's removal, sirs? Avouch!

XIX.

"'*Removal, not destruction, sirs!*
Just turn your picture! Let it front
The public path! Or memory errs,
Or that same public path is wont
To witness many a chance befall
Of lust, theft, bloodshed—sins enough,
Wherein our Hebrew part is small.
Convert yourselves!'—he cut up rough.

XX.

"Look you, how soon a service paid
Religion yields the servant fruit!
A prompt reply our Farmer made
So following: '*Sirs, to grant your suit*
Involves much danger! How? Transpose
Our Lady? Stop the chastisement,
All for your good, herself bestows?
What wonder if I grudge consent?

XXI.

"'—*Yet grant it: since, what cash I take*
Is so much saved from wicked use.
We know you! And, for Mary's sake,
A hundred ducats shall induce
Concession to your prayer. One day
Suffices: Master Buti's brush
Turns Mary round the other way,
And deluges your side with slush.

XXII.

"'*Down with the ducats therefore!*' Dump,
Dump, dump it falls, each counted piece,
Hard gold. Then out of door they stump,
These dogs, each brisk as with new lease

Of life, I warrant,—glad he 'll die
Henceforward just as he may choose,
Be buried and in clover lie!
Well said Esaias—'*stiff-necked Jews!*'

XXIII.

"Off posts without a minute's loss
Our Farmer, once the cash in poke
And summons Buti—ere its gloss
Have time to fade from off the joke—
To chop and change his work, undo
The done side, make the side, now blank,
Recipient of our Lady—who,
Displaced thus, had these dogs to thank!

XXIV.

"Now, boy, you 're hardly to instruct
In technicalities of Art!
My nephew's childhood sure has sucked
Along with mother's-milk some part
Of painter's-practice—learned, at least,
How expeditiously is plied
A work in fresco—never ceased
When once begun—a day, each side.

XXV.

"So, Buti—(he 's with God)—begins:
First covers up the shrine all round
With hoarding; then, as like as twins,
Paints, t' other side the burial-ground,
New Mary, every point the same;
Next, sluices over, as agreed,
The old; and last—but, spoil the game
By telling you? Not I, indeed!

XXVI.

"Well, ere the week was half at end,
Out came the object of this zeal,
This fine alacrity to spend
Hard money for mere dead men's weal!
How think you? That old spokesman Jew
Was High Priest, and he had a wife
As old, and she was dying too,
And wished to end in peace her life!

XXVII.

"And he must humour dying whims,
And soothe her with the idle hope
They 'd say their prayers and sing their hymns
As if her husband were the Pope!

And she did die—believing just
This privilege was purchased! Dead
In comfort through her foolish trust!
'*Stiff-necked ones*,' well Esaias said!

XXVIII.

"So, Sabbath morning, out of gate
And on to way, what sees our arch
Good Farmer? Why, they hoist their freight—
The corpse—on shoulder, and so, march!
'*Now for it, Buti!*' In the nick
Of time 't is pully-hauly, hence
With hoarding! O'er the wayside quick
There 's Mary plain in evidence!

XXIX.

"And here 's the convoy halting: right!
O they are bent on howling psalms
And growling prayers, when opposite!
And yet they glance, for all their qualms,
Approve that promptitude of his,
The Farmer's—duly at his post
To take due thanks from every phyz,
Sour smirk—nay, surly smile almost!

XXX.

"Then earthward drops each brow again;
The solemn task 's resumed; they reach
Their holy field—the unholy train:
Enter its precinct, all and each,
Wrapt somehow in their godless rites;
Till, rites at end, up-waking, lo
They lift their faces! What delights
The mourners as they turn to go?

XXXI.

"Ha, ha, he, he! On just the side
They drew their purse-strings to make quit
Of Mary,—Christ the Crucified
Fronted them now—these biters bit!
Never was such a hiss and snort,
Such screwing nose and shooting lip!
Their purchase—honey in report—
Proved gall and verjuice at first sip!

XXXII.

"Out they break, on they bustle, where,
A-top of wall, the Farmer waits
With Buti: never fun so rare!
The Farmer has the best: he rates

The rascal, as the old High Priest
Takes on himself to sermonize—
Nay, sneer '*We Jews supposed, at least,*
Theft was a crime in Christian eyes!

XXXIII.

"'*Theft?*' cries the Farmer. '*Eat your words!*
Show me what constitutes a breach
Of faith in aught was said or heard!
I promised you in plainest speech
I'd take the thing you count disgrace
And put it here—and here 't is put!
Did you suppose I 'd leave the place
Blank, therefore, just your rage to glut?

XXXIV.

"'*I guess you dared not stipulate*
For such a damned impertinence!
So, quick, my greybeard, out of gate
And in at Ghetto! Haste you hence!
As long as I have house and land,
To spite you irreligious chaps
Here shall the Crucifixion stand—
Unless you down with cash, perhaps!'

XXXV.

"So snickered he and Buti both.
The Jews said nothing, interchanged
A glance or two, renewed their oath
To keep ears stopped and hearts estranged
From grace, for all our Church can do;
Then off they scuttle: sullen jog
Homewards, against our Church to brew
Fresh mischief in their synagogue.

XXXVI.

"But next day—see what happened, boy!
See why I bid you have a care
How you pelt Jews! The knaves employ
Such methods of revenge, forbear
No outrage on our faith, when free
To wreak their malice! Here they took
So base a method—plague o' me
If I record it in my Book!

XXXVII.

"For, next day, while the Farmer sat
Laughing with Buti, in his shop,
At their successful joke,—rat-tat,—
Door opens, and they 're like to drop

Down to the floor as in there stalks
A six-feet-high herculean-built
Young he-Jew with a beard that baulks
Description. '*Help ere blood be spilt!*'

XXXVIII.

—"Screamed Buti: for he recognized
Whom but the son, no less no more,
Of that High Priest his work surprised
So pleasantly the day before!
Son of the mother, then, whereof
The bier he lent a shoulder to,
And made the moans about, dared scoff
At sober Christian grief—the Jew!

XXXIX.

"'*Sirs, I salute you! Never rise!*
No apprehension!' (Buti, white
And trembling like a tub of size,
Had tried to smuggle out of sight
The picture's self—the thing in oils,
You know, from which a fresco's dashed
Which courage speeds while caution spoils)
'*Stay and be praised, sir, unabashed!*

XL.

" '*Praised,—ay, and paid too: for I come*
To buy that very work of yours.
My poor abode, which boasts—well, some
Few specimens of Art, secures
Haply, a masterpiece indeed
If I should find my humble means
Suffice the outlay. So, proceed!
Propose—ere prudence intervenes!'

XLI.

" On Buti, cowering like a child,
These words descended from aloft,
In tone so ominously mild,
With smile terrifically soft
To that degree—could Buti dare
(Poor fellow) use his brains, think twice?
He asked, thus taken unaware,
No more than just the proper price!

XLII.

" '*Done!*' cries the monster. '*I disburse*
Forthwith your moderate demand.
Count on my custom—if no worse
Your future work be, understand,

Than this I carry off! No aid!
My arm, sir, lacks nor bone nor thews:
The burden's easy, and we're made,
Easy or hard, to bear—we Jews!'

XLIII.

"Crossing himself at such escape,
Buti by turns the money eyes
And, timidly, the stalwart shape
Now moving doorwards; but, more wise,
The Farmer,—who, though dumb, this while
Had watched advantage,—straight conceived
A reason for that tone and smile
So mild and soft! The Jew—believed!

XLIV.

"Mary in triumph borne to deck
A Hebrew household! Pictured where
No one was used to bend the neck
In praise or bow the knee in prayer!
Borne to that domicile by whom?
The son of the High Priest! Through what?
An insult done his mother's tomb!
Saul changed to Paul—the case came pat!

XLV.

"'Stay, dog-Jew . . . gentle sir, that is!
Resolve me! Can it be, she crowned,—
Mary, by miracle,—Oh bliss!—
My present to your burial ground?
Certain, a ray of light has burst
Your veil of darkness! Had you else,
Only for Mary's sake, unpursed
So much hard money? Tell—oh, tell's!'

XLVI.

"Round—like a serpent that we took
For worm and trod on—turns his bulk
About the Jew. First dreadful look
Sends Buti in a trice to skulk
Out of sight somewhere, safe—alack!
But our good Farmer faith made bold:
And firm (with Florence at his back)
He stood, while gruff the gutturals rolled—

XLVII.

"'Ay, sir, a miracle was worked,
By quite another power, I trow,
Than ever yet in canvas lurked,
Or you would scarcely face me now!

A certain impulse did suggest
A certain grasp with this right-hand,
Which probably had put to rest
Our quarrel,—thus your throat once spanned!

XLVIII.

"'But I remembered me, subdued
That impulse, and you face me still!
And soon a philosophic mood
Succeeding (hear it, if you will!)
Has altogether changed my views
Concerning Art. Blind prejudice!
Well may you Christians tax us Jews
With scrupulosity too nice!

XLIX.

"'For, don't I see,—let 's issue join!—
Whenever I 'm allowed pollute
(I—and my little bag of coin)
Some Christian palace of repute,—
Don't I see stuck up everywhere
Abundant proof that cultured taste
Has Beauty for its only care,
And upon Truth no thought to waste?

L.

"'Jew, since it must be, take in pledge
Of payment '—*so a Cardinal*
Has sighed to me as if a wedge
Entered his heart—' this best of all
My treasures!' *Leda, Ganymede*
Or Antiope: swan, eagle, ape,
(*Or what's the beast of what 's the breed*)
And Jupiter in every shape!

LI.

"' *Whereat if I presume to ask*
'But, Eminence, though Titian's whisk
Of brush have well performed its task,
How comes it these false godships frisk
In presence of—what yonder frame
Pretends to image? Surely, odd
It seems, you let confront The Name
Each beast the heathen called his god!'

LII

"'*Benignant smiles me pity straight*
The Cardinal. 'T is Truth, we prize!
Art 's the sole question in debate!
These subjects are so many lies.

We treat them with a proper scorn
When we turn lies—called gods forsooth—
To lies' fit use, now Christ is born.
Drawing and colouring are Truth.

LIII.

"'Think you I honour lies so much
As scruple to parade the charms
Of Leda—Titian, every touch—
Because the thing within her arms
Means Jupiter who had the praise
And prayer of a benighted world?
He would have mine too, if, in days
Of light, I kept the canvas furled!'

LIV.

"'*So ending, with some easy gibe.*
What power has logic! *I, at once,*
Acknowledged error in our tribe
So squeamish that, when friends ensconce
A pretty picture in its niche
To do us honour, deck our graves,
We fret and fume and have an itch
To strangle folk—ungrateful knaves!

LV.

"'*No, sir! Be sure that—what 's its style,*
Your picture?—shall possess ungrudged
A place among my rank and file
Of Ledas and what not—be judged
Just as a picture! and (*because*
I fear me much I scarce have bought
A Titian) *Master Buti's flaws*
Found there, will have the laugh flaws ought!'

LVI.

"So, with a scowl, it darkens door—
This bulk—no longer! Buti makes
Prompt glad re-entry; there 's a score
Of oaths, as the good Farmer wakes
From what must needs have been a trance,
Or he had struck (he swears) to ground
The bold bad mouth that dared advance
Such doctrine the reverse of sound!

LVII.

"Was magic here? Most like! For, since,
Somehow our city's faith grows still
More and more lukewarm, and our Prince
Or loses heart or wants the will

To check increase of cold. 'T is '*Live*
And let live! Languidly repress
The Dissident! In short,—contrive
Christians must bear with Jews: no less!'

LVIII.

"The end seems, any Israelite
Wants any picture,—pishes, poohs,
Purchases, hangs it full in sight
In any chamber he may choose!
In Christ's crown, one more thorn we rue!
In Mary's bosom, one more sword!
No, boy, you must not pelt a Jew!
O Lord, how long? How long, O Lord?"

EPILOGUE.

μεστοὶ . . .
οἱ δ' ἀμφορῆς οἴνου μέλανος ἀνθοσμίου.

I.

"The poets pour us wine—"
Said the dearest poet I ever knew,
Dearest and greatest and best to me.
You clamour athirst for poetry—
We pour. "But when shall a vintage be"—
You cry—"strong grape, squeezed gold from screw,
Yet sweet juice, flavoured flowery-fine?
That were indeed the wine!"

II.

One pours your cup—stark strength,
Meat for a man; and you eye the pulp
Strained, turbid still, from the viscous blood
Of the snaky bough: and you grumble "Good!

For it swells resolve, breeds hardihood;
Despatch it, then, in a single gulp!"
So, down, with a wry face, goes at length
The liquor: stuff for strength.

III.

One pours your cup—sheer sweet,
The fragrant fumes of a year condensed:
Suspicion of all that 's ripe or rathe,
From the bud on branch to the grass in swathe.
"We suck mere milk of the seasons," saith
A curl of each nostril—"dew, dispensed
Nowise for nerving man to feat:
Boys sip such honeyed sweet!"

IV.

And thus who wants wine strong,
Waves each sweet smell of the year away;
Who likes to swoon as the sweets suffuse
His brain with a mixture of beams and dews
Turned syrupy drink—rough strength eschews:
"What though in our veins your wine-stock stay?
The lack of the bloom does our palate wrong.
Give us wine sweet, not strong!"

V.

Yet wine is—some affirm—
Prime wine is found in the world somewhere,
Of potable strength with sweet to match.
You double your heart its dose, yet catch—
As the draught descends—a violet-smatch,
Softness—however it came there,
Through drops expressed by the fire and worm:
Strong sweet wine—some affirm.

VI.

Body and bouquet both?
'T is easy to ticket a bottle so;
But what was the case in the cask, my friends?
Cask? Nay, the vat—where the maker mends
His strong with his sweet (you suppose) and blends
His rough with his smooth, till none can know
How it comes you may tipple, nothing loth,
Body and bouquet both.

VII.

"You" being just—the world.
No poets—who turn, themselves, the winch
Of the press; no critics—I 'll even say,
(Being flustered and easy of faith to-day)

Who for love of the work have learned the way
Till themselves produce home-made, at a pinch:
No! You are the world, and wine ne'er purled
Except to please the world!

VIII.

"For, oh the common heart!
And, ah the irremissible sin
Of poets who please themselves, not us!
Strong wine yet sweet wine pouring thus,
How please still—Pindar and Æschylus!—
Drink—dipt into by the bearded chin
Alike and the bloomy lip—no part
Denied the common heart!

IX.

"And might we get such grace,
And did you moderns but stock our vault
With the true half-brandy half-attar-gul,
How would seniors indulge at a hearty pull
While juniors tossed off their thimbleful!
Our Shakespeare and Milton escaped your fault,
So, they reign supreme o'er the weaker race
That wants the ancient grace!"

X.

If I paid myself with words
(As the French say well) I were dupe indeed!
I were found in belief that you quaffed and bowsed
At your Shakespeare the whole day long, caroused
In your Milton pottle-deep nor drowsed
A moment of night—toped on, took heed
Of nothing like modern cream-and-curds.
Pay me with deeds, not words!

XI.

For—see your cellarage!
There are forty barrels with Shakespeare's brand.
Some five or six are abroach: the rest
Stand spigoted, fauceted. Try and test
What yourselves call best of the very best!
How comes it that still untouched they stand?
Why don't you try tap, advance a stage
With the rest in cellarage?

XII.

For—see your cellarage!
There are four big butts of Milton's brew.
How comes it you make old drips and drops
Do duty, and there devotion stops?

Leave such an abyss of malt and hops
Embellied in butts which bungs still glue?
You hate your bard! A fig for your rage!
Free him from cellarage!

XIII.

'T is said I brew stiff drink,
But the deuce a flavour of grape is there.
Hardly a May-go-down, 't is just
A sort of a gruff Go-down-it-must—
No Merry-go-down, no gracious gust
Commingles the racy with Springtide's rare!
"What wonder," say you "that we cough, and blink
At Autumn's heady drink?"

XIV.

Is it a fancy, friends?
Mighty and mellow are never mixed,
Though mighty and mellow be born at once.
Sweet for the future,—strong for the nonce!
Stuff you should stow away, ensconce
In the deep and dark, to be found fast-fixed
At the century's close: such time strength spends
A-sweetening for my friends!

XV

And then—why, what you quaff
With a smack of lip and a cluck of tongue,
Is leakage and leavings—just what haps
From the tun some learned taster taps
With a promise "Prepare your watery chaps!
Here 's properest wine for old and young!
Dispute its perfection—you make us laugh!
Have faith, give thanks, but—quaff!"

XVI.

Leakage, I say, or—worse—
Leavings suffice pot-valiant souls.
Somebody, brimful, long ago,
Frothed flagon he drained to the dregs; and lo,
Down whisker and beard what an overflow!
Lick spilth that has trickled from classic jowls,
Sup the single scene, sip the only verse—
Old wine, not new and worse!

XVII.

I grant you: worse by much!
Renounce that new where you never gained
One glow at heart, one gleam at head,
And stick to the warrant of age instead!

No dwarf's-lap! Fatten, by giants fed!
You fatten, with oceans of drink undrained?
You feed—who would choke did a cobweb smutch
The Age you love so much?

XVIII.

A mine 's beneath a moor:
Acres of moor roof fathoms of mine
Which diamonds dot where you please to dig;
Yet who plies spade for the bright and big?
Your product is—truffles, you hunt with a pig!
Since bright-and-big, when a man would dine,
Suits badly: and therefore the Koh-i-noor
May sleep in mine 'neath moor!

XIX.

Wine, pulse in might from me!
It may never emerge in must from vat,
Never fill cask nor furnish can,
Never end sweet, which strong began—
God's gift to gladden the heart of man;
But spirit 's at proof, I promise that!
No sparing of juice spoils what should be
Fit brewage—mine for me.

XX.

Man's thoughts and loves and hates!
Earth is my vineyard, these grew there:
From grape of the ground, I made or marred
My vintage; easy the task or hard,
Who set it—his praise be my reward!
Earth's yield! Who yearn for the Dark Blue Sea's,
Let them "lay, pray, bray"—the addle-pates!
Mine be Man's thoughts, loves, hates!

XXI.

But someone says "Good Sir!"
('T is a worthy versed in what concerns
The making such labour turn out well)
"You don't suppose that the nosegay-smell
Needs always come from the grape? Each bell
At your foot, each bud that your culture spurns,
The very cowslip would act like myrrh
On the stiffest brew—good Sir!

XXII.

"Cowslips, abundant birth
O'er meadow and hillside, vineyard too,
—Like a schoolboy's scrawlings in and out
Distasteful lesson-book—all about

Greece and Rome, victory and rout—
Love-verses instead of such vain ado!
So, fancies frolic it o'er the earth
Where thoughts have rightlier birth.

XXIII.

"Nay, thoughtlings they themselves:
Loves, hates—in little and less and least!
Thoughts? '*What is a man beside a mount!*'
Loves? '*Absent—poor lovers the minutes count!*
Hates? '*Fie—Pope's letters to Martha Blount!*
These furnish a wine for a children's-feast:
Insipid to man, they suit the elves
Like thoughts, loves, hates themselves."

XXIV.

And, friends, beyond dispute
I too have the cowslips dewy and dear.
Punctual as Springtide forth peep they:
I leave them to make my meadow gay.
But I ought to pluck and impound them, eh?
Not let them alone, but deftly shear
And shred and reduce to—what may suit
Children, beyond dispute?

XXV.

And, here 's May-month, all bloom,
All bounty: what if I sacrifice?
If I out with shears and shear, nor stop
Shearing till prostrate, lo, the crop?
And will you prefer it to ginger-pop
When I 've made you wine of the memories
Which leave as bare as a churchyard tomb
My meadow, late all bloom?

XXVI.

Nay, what ingratitude
Should I hesitate to amuse the wits
That have pulled so long at my flask, nor grudged
The headache that paid their pains, nor budged
From bunghole before they sighed and judged
"Too rough for our taste, to-day, befits
The racy and right when the years conclude!"
Out on ingratitude!

XXVII.

Grateful or ingrate—none,
No cowslip of all my fairy crew
Shall help to concoct what makes you wink
And goes to your head till you think you think!

I like them alive: the printer's ink
Would sensibly tell on the perfume too.
I may use up my nettles, ere I 've done;
But of cowslips—friends get none!

XXVIII.

Don't nettles make a broth
Wholesome for blood grown lazy and thick?
Maws out of sorts make mouths out of taste.
My Thirty-four Port—no need to waste
On a tongue that 's fur and a palate—paste!
A magnum for friends who are sound! The sick—
I 'll posset and cosset them, nothing loth,
Henceforward with nettle-broth!

LA SAISIAZ.

I.

Good, to forgive;
Best, to forget;
Living, we fret;
Dying, we live.
Fretless and free,
Soul, clap thy pinion!
Earth have dominion,
Body, o'er thee!

II.

Wander at will,
Day after day,—
Wander away,
Wandering still—
Soul that canst soar!
Body may slumber:
Body shall cumber
Soul-flight no more.

III.

Waft of soul's wing!
What lies above?
Sunshine and Love,
Skyblue and Spring!
Body hides—where?
Ferns of all feather,
Mosses and heather,
Yours be the care!

LA SAISIAZ.

1878.

A. E. S. SEPTEMBER 14, 1877.

DARED and done: at last I stand upon the summit,
Dear and True!
Singly dared and done; the climbing both of us were
bound to do.
Petty feat and yet prodigious: every side my glance was
bent
O'er the grandeur and the beauty lavished through the
whole ascent.
Ledge by ledge, out broke new marvels, now minute and
now immense:
Earth's most exquisite disclosure, heaven's own God in
evidence!
And no berry in its hiding, no blue space in its out-
spread,

Pleaded to escape my footstep, challenged my emerging
head,
(As I climbed or paused from climbing, now o'erbranched
by shrub and tree,
Now built round by rock and boulder, now at just a turn
set free,
Stationed face to face with—Nature? rather with Infini-
tude)
—No revealment of them all, as singly I my path
pursued,
But a bitter touched its sweetness, for the thought stung
"Even so
Both of us had loved and wondered just the same,
five days ago!"
Five short days, sufficient hardly to entice, from out its
den
Splintered in the slab, this pink perfection of the
cyclamen;
Scarce enough to heal and coat with amber gum the
sloe-tree's gash,
Bronze the clustered wilding apple, redden ripe the
mountain-ash:
Yet of might to place between us—Oh the barrier! Yon
Profound
Shrinks beside it, proves a pin-point: barrier this, with-
out a bound!

Boundless though it be, I reach you: somehow seem to
have you here
—Who are there. Yes, there you dwell now, plain the
four low walls appear;
Those are vineyards they enclose from; and the little
spire which points
—That 's Collonge, henceforth your dwelling. All the
same, howe'er disjoints
Past from present, no less certain you are here, not
there: have dared,
Done the feat of mountain-climbing,—five days since, we
both prepared
Daring, doing, arm in arm, if other help should haply
fail.
For you asked, as forth we sallied to see sunset from the
vale,
"Why not try for once the mountain,—take a foretaste,
snatch by stealth
Sight and sound, some unconsidered fragment of the
hoarded wealth?
Six weeks at its base, yet never once have we together
won
Sight or sound by honest climbing: let us two have
dared and done
Just so much of twilight journey as may prove to-
morrow's jaunt

Not the only mode of wayfare—wheeled to reach the eagle's haunt!"

So, we turned from the low grass-path you were pleased to call "your own,"

Set our faces to the rose-bloom o'er the summit's front of stone

Where Salève obtains, from Jura and the sunken sun she hides,

Due return of blushing "Good Night," rosy as a borne-off bride's,

For his masculine "Good Morrow" when, with sunrise still in hold,

Gay he hails her, and, magnific, thrilled her black length burns to gold.

Up and up we went, how careless—nay, how joyous! All was new,

All was strange. "Call progress toilsome? that were just insulting you!

How the trees must temper noontide! Ah, the thicket's sudden break!

What will be the morning glory, when at dusk thus gleams the lake?

Light by light puts forth Geneva: what a land—and, of the land,

Can there be a lovelier station than this spot where now we stand?

Is it late, and wrong to linger? True, to-morrow makes amends.
Toilsome progress? child's play, call it—specially when one descends!
There, the dread descent is over—hardly our adventure, though!
Take the vale where late we left it, pace the grass-path, 'mine,' you know!
Proud completion of achievement!" And we paced it, praising still
That soft tread on velvet verdure as it wound through hill and hill;
And at very end there met us, coming from Collonge, the pair
—All our people of the Chalet—two, enough and none to spare.
So, we made for home together, and we reached it as the stars
One by one came lamping—chiefly that prepotency of Mars—
And your last word was "I owe you this enjoyment!"—met with "Nay:
With yourself it rests to have a month of morrows like to-day!"
Then the meal, with talk and laughter, and the news of that rare nook

Yet untroubled by the tourist, touched on by no travel book,
All the same—though latent—patent, hybrid birth of land and sea,
And (our travelled friend assured you)—if such miracle might be—
Comparable for completeness of both blessings—all around
Nature, and, inside her circle, safety from world's sight and sound—
Comparable to our Saisiaz. "Hold it fast and guard it well!
Go and see and vouch for certain, then come back and never tell
Living soul but us; and haply, prove our sky from cloud as clear,
There may we four meet, praise fortune just as now, another year!"

Thus you charged him on departure: not without the final charge
"Mind to-morrow's early meeting! We must leave our journey marge
Ample for the wayside wonders: there 's the stoppage at the inn
Three-parts up the mountain, where the hardships of the track begin;

There 's the convent worth a visit; but, the triumph crowning all—
There 's Salève's own platform facing glory which strikes greatness small,
—Blanc, supreme above his earth-brood, needles red and white and green,
Horns of silver, fangs of crystal set on edge in his demesne.
So, some three weeks since, we saw them: so, to-morrow we intend
You shall see them likewise; therefore Good Night till to-morrow, friend!"
Last, the nothings that extinguish embers of a vivid day:
"What might be the Marshal's next move, what Gambetta's counter-play?"
Till the landing on the staircase saw escape the latest spark:
"Sleep you well!" "Sleep but as well, you!"—lazy love quenched, all was dark.

Nothing dark next day at sundawn! Up I rose and forth I fared:
Took my plunge within the bath-pool, pacified the watch-dog scared,
Saw proceed the transmutation—Jura's black to one gold glow,

Trod your level path that let me drink the morning deep
and slow,
Reached the little quarry—ravage recompensed by shrub
and fern—
Till the overflowing ardours told me time was for return.
So, return I did, and gaily. But, for once, from no far
mound
Waved salute a tall white figure. "Has her sleep been
so profound?
Foresight, rather, prudent saving strength for day's ex-
penditure!
Ay, the chamber-window 's open: out and on the terrace,
sure!"

No, the terrace showed no figure, tall, white, leaning
through the wreaths,
Tangle-twine of leaf and bloom that intercept the air one
breathes,
Interpose between one's love and Nature's loving, hill
and dale
Down to where the blue lake's wrinkle marks the river's
inrush pale
—Mazy Arve: whereon no vessel but goes sliding white
and plain,
Not a steamboat pants from harbour but one hears
pulsate amain,

Past the city's congregated peace of homes and pomp of spires
—Man's mild protest that there 's something more than Nature, man requires,
And that, useful as is Nature to attract the tourist's foot,
Quiet slow sure money-making proves the matter's very root,—
Need for body,—while the spirit also needs a comfort reached
By no help of lake or mountain, but the texts whence Calvin preached.
"Here 's the veil withdrawn from landscape: up to Jura and beyond,
All awaits us ranged and ready; yet she violates the bond,
Neither leans nor looks nor listens: why is this?" A turn of eye
Took the whole sole answer, gave the undisputed reason "why!"

This dread way you had your summons! No premonitory touch,
As you talked and laughed ('t is told me) scarce a minute ere the clutch
Captured you in cold forever. Cold? nay, warm you were as life

When I raised you, while the others used, in passionate
poor strife,
All the means that seemed to promise any aid, and all in
vain.
Gone you were, and I shall never see that earnest face
again
Grow transparent, grow transfigured with the sudden light
that leapt,
At the first word's provocation, from the heart-deeps
where it slept.

Therefore, paying piteous duty, what seemed You have
we consigned
Peacefully to—what I think were, of all earth-beds, to
your mind
Most the choice for quiet, yonder: low walls stop the
vines' approach,
Lovingly Salève protects you; village-sports will ne'er
encroach
On the stranger lady's silence, whom friends bore so kind
and well
Thither "just for love's sake,"—such their own word was:
and who can tell?
You supposed that few or none had known and loved
you in the world:

May be! flower that 's full-blown tempts the butterfly,
not flower that 's furled.
But more learned sense unlocked you, loosed the sheath
and let expand
Bud to bell and outspread flower-shape at the least warm
touch of hand
—Maybe, throb of heart, beneath which,—quickening
farther than it knew,—
Treasure oft was disembosomed, scent all strange and
unguessed hue.
Disembosomed, re-embosomed,—must one memory suf-
fice,
Prove I knew an Alpine-rose which all beside named
Edelweiss?

Rare thing, red or white, you rest now: two days slum-
bered through; and since
One day more will see me rid of this same scene whereat
I wince,
Tetchy at all sights and sounds and pettish at each idle
charm
Proffered me who pace now singly where we two went
arm in arm,—
I have turned upon my weakness: asked "And what,
forsooth, prevents
That, this latest day allowed me, I fulfil of her intents

One she had the most at heart—that we should thus again survey
From Salève Mont Blanc together? " Therefore,—dared and done to-day
Climbing,—here I stand: but you—where?

If a spirit of the place
Broke the silence, bade me question, promised answer,—what disgrace
Did I stipulate " Provided answer suit my hopes, not fears! "
Would I shrink to learn my life-time's limit—days, weeks, months or years?
Would I shirk assurance on each point whereat I can but guess—
" Does the soul survive the body? Is there God's self, no or yes? "
If I know my mood, 't were constant—come in whatsoe'er uncouth
Shape it should, nay, formidable—so the answer were but truth.

Well, and wherefore shall it daunt me, when 't is I myself am tasked,
When, by weakness weakness questioned, weakly answers —weakly asked?

Weakness never needs be falseness: truth is truth in each degree
—Thunderpealed by God to Nature, whispered by my soul to me.
Nay, the weakness turns to strength and triumphs in a truth beyond:
"Mine is but man's truest answer—how were it did God respond?"
I shall no more dare to mimic such response in futile speech,
Pass off human lisp as echo of the sphere-song out of reach,
Than,—because it well may happen yonder, where the far snows blanch
Mute Mont Blanc, that who stands near them sees and hears an avalanche,—
I shall pick a clod and throw,—cry "Such the sight and such the sound!
What though I nor see nor hear them? Others do, the proofs abound!"
Can I make my eye an eagle's, sharpen ear to recognize
Sound o'er league and league of silence? Can I know, who but surmise?
If I dared no self-deception when, a week since, I and you

Walked and talked along the grass-path, passing lightly in review
What seemed hits and what seemed misses in a certain fence-play,—strife
Sundry minds of mark engaged in "On the Soul and Future Life,"—
If I ventured estimating what was come of parried thrust,
Subtle stroke, and, rightly, wrongly, estimating could be just
—Just, though life so seemed abundant in the form which moved by mine,
I might well have played at feigning, fooling,—laughed "What need opine
Pleasure must succeed to pleasure, else past pleasure turns to pain,
And this first life claims a second, else I count its good no gain?"—
Much less have I heart to palter when the matter to decide
Now becomes "Was ending ending once and always, when you died?"
Did the face, the form I lifted as it lay, reveal the loss
Not alone of life but soul? A tribute to yon flowers and moss,

What of you remains beside? A memory! Easy to attest
"Certainly from out the world that one believes who knew her best
Such was good in her, such fair, which fair and good were great perchance
Had but fortune favoured, bidden each shy faculty advance;
After all—who knows another? Only as I know, I speak."
So much of you lives within me while I live my year or week.
Then my fellow takes the tale up, not unwilling to aver
Duly in his turn "I knew him best of all, as he knew her:
Such he was, and such he was not, and such other might have been
But that somehow every actor, somewhere in this earthly scene,
Fails." And so both memories dwindle, yours and mine together linked,
Till there is but left for comfort, when the last spark proves extinct,
This—that somewhere new existence led by men and women new

Possibly attains perfection coveted by me and you ;
While ourselves, the only witness to what work our life evolved,
Only to ourselves proposing problems proper to be solved
By ourselves alone,—who working ne'er shall know if work bear fruit
Others reap and garner, heedless how produced by stalk and root,—
We who, darkling, timed the day's birth,—struggling, testified to peace,—
Earned, by dint of failure, triumph,—we, creative thought, must cease
In created word, thought's echo, due to impulse long since sped !
Why repine ? There 's ever someone lives although ourselves be dead !

Well, what signifies repugnance ? Truth is truth howe'er it strike.
Fair or foul the lot apportioned life on earth, we bear alike.
Stalwart body idly yoked to stunted spirit, powers, that fain
Else would soar, condemned to grovel, groundlings through the fleshly chain,—

Help that hinders, hindrance proved but help disguised
when all too late,—
Hindrance is the fact acknowledged, howsoe'er explained
as Fate,
Fortune, Providence: we bear, own life a burthen more
or less.
Life thus owned unhappy, is there supplemental happi-
ness
Possible and probable in life to come? or must we
count
Life a curse and not a blessing, summed-up in its whole
amount,
Help and hindrance, joy and sorrow?
Why should I want courage here?
I will ask and have an answer,—with no favour, with no
fear,—
From myself. How much, how little, do I inwardly
believe
True that controverted doctrine? Is it fact to which I
cleave,
Is it fancy I but cherish, when I take upon my
lips
Phrase the solemn Tuscan fashioned, and declare the
soul's eclipse
Not the soul's extinction? take his "I believe and I
declare—

Certain am I—from this life I pass into a better, there
Where that lady lives of whom enamoured was my soul" —where this
Other lady, my companion dear and true, she also is?

I have questioned and am answered. Question, answer presuppose
Two points: that the thing itself which questions, answers,—*is*, it knows;
As it also knows the thing perceived outside itself,—a force
Actual ere its own beginning, operative through its course,
Unaffected by its end,—that this thing likewise needs must be;
Call this—God, then, call that—soul, and both—the only facts for me.
Prove them facts? that they o'erpass my power of proving, proves them such:
Fact it is I know I know not something which is fact as much.
What before caused all the causes, what effect of all effects
Haply follows,—these are fancy. Ask the rush if it suspects

Whence and how the stream which floats it had a rise,
and where and how
Falls or flows on still! What answer makes the rush
except that now
Certainly it floats and is, and, no less certain than
itself,
Is the everyway external stream that now through shoal
and shelf
Floats it onward, leaves it—may be—wrecked at last, or
lands on shore
There to root again and grow and flourish stable
evermore.
—May be! mere surmise not knowledge: much con-
jecture styled belief,
What the rush conceives the stream means through the
voyage blind and brief.
Why, because I doubtless am, shall I as doubtless be?
"Because
God seems good and wise." Yet under this our life's
apparent laws
Reigns a wrong which, righted once, would give quite
other laws to life.
"He seems potent." Potent here, then: why are right
and wrong at strife?
Has in life the wrong the better? Happily life ends so
soon!

Right predominates in life? Then why two lives and
double boon?
"Anyhow, we want it: wherefore want?" Because,
without the want,
Life, now human, would be brutish: just that hope, how-
ever scant,
Makes the actual life worth leading; take the hope
therein away,
All we have to do is surely not endure another
day.
This life has its hopes for this life, hopes that promise
joy: life done—
Out of all the hopes, how many had complete fulfilment?
none.
"But the soul is not the body:" and the breath is not
the flute;
Both together make the music: either marred and all is
mute.
Truce to such old sad contention whence, according as
we shape
Most of hope or most of fear, we issue in a half-
escape:
"We believe" is sighed. I take the cup of comfort
proffered thus,
Taste and try each soft ingredient, sweet infusion, and
discuss

What their blending may accomplish for the cure of
doubt, till—slow,
Sorrowful, but how decided! needs must I o'erturn it—so!
Cause before, effect behind me—blanks! The midway
point I am,
Caused, itself—itself efficient: in that narrow space
must cram
All experience—out of which there crowds conjecture
manifold,
But, as knowledge, this comes only—things may be as I
behold,
Or may not be, but, without me and above me, things
there are;
I myself am what I know not—ignorance which proves
no bar
To the knowledge that I am, and, since I am, can
recognize
What to me is pain and pleasure: this is sure, the rest—
surmise.
If my fellows are or are not, what may please them and
what pain,—
Mere surmise: my own experience—that is knowledge,
once again!

I have lived, then, done and suffered, loved and hated,
learnt and taught

This—there is no reconciling wisdom with a world distraught,
Goodness with triumphant evil, power with failure in the aim,
If—(to my own sense, remember! though none other feel the same!)—
If you bar me from assuming earth to be a pupil's place,
And life, time,—with all their chances, changes,—just probation-space,
Mine, for me. But those apparent other mortals—theirs, for them?
Knowledge stands on my experience: all outside its narrow hem,
Free surmise may sport and welcome! Pleasures, pains affect mankind
Just as they affect myself? Why, here 's my neighbour colour-blind,
Eyes like mine to all appearance: "green as grass" do I affirm?
"Red as grass" he contradicts me: which employs the proper term?
Were we two the earth's sole tenants, with no third for referee,
How should I distinguish? Just so, God must judge 'twixt man and me.

To each mortal peradventure earth becomes a new
machine,
Pain and pleasure no more tally in our sense than red
and green;
Still, without what seems such mortal's pleasure, pain,
my life were lost
—Life, my whole sole chance to prove—although at
man's apparent cost—
What is beauteous and what ugly, right to strive for,
right to shun,
Fit to help and fit to hinder,—prove my forces everyone,
Good and evil,—learn life's lesson, hate of evil, love of
good,
As 't is set me, understand so much as may be under-
stood—
Solve the problem: "From thine apprehended scheme
of things, deduce
Praise or blame of its contriver, shown a niggard or
profuse
In each good or evil issue! nor miscalculate alike
Counting one the other in the final balance, which to
strike,
Soul was born and life allotted: ay, the show of things
unfurled
For thy summing-up and judgment,—thine, no other
mortal's world!"

What though fancy scarce may grapple with the complex and immense
—"His own world for every mortal?" Postulate omnipotence!
Limit power, and simple grows the complex: shrunk to atom size,
That which loomed immense to fancy low before my reason lies,—
I survey it and pronounce it work like other work: success
Here and there, the workman's glory,—here and there, his shame no less,
Failure as conspicuous. Taunt not "Human work ape work divine?"
As the power, expect performance! God's be God's as mine is mine!
God whose power made man and made man's wants, and made, to meet those wants,
Heaven and earth which, through the body, prove the spirit's ministrants,
Excellently all,—did He lack power or was the will in fault
When He let blue heaven be shrouded o'er by vapours of the vault,
Gay earth drop her garlands shrivelled at the first infecting breath

Of the serpent pains which herald, swarming in, the dragon death?
What, no way but this that man may learn and lay to heart how rife
Life were with delights would only death allow their taste to life?
Must the rose sigh "Pluck—I perish!" must the eve weep "Gaze—I fade!"
—Every sweet warn "'Ware my bitter!" every shine bid "Wait my shade"?
Can we love but on condition, that the thing we love must die?
Needs there groan a world in anguish just to teach us sympathy—
Multitudinously wretched that we, wretched too, may guess
What a preferable state were universal happiness?
Hardly do I so conceive the outcome of that power which went
To the making of the worm there in yon clod its tenement,
Any more than I distinguish aught of that which, wise and good,
Framed the leaf, its plain of pasture, dropped the dew, its fineless food.
Nay, were fancy fact, were earth and all it holds illusion mere,

Only a machine for teaching love and hate and hope and fear
To myself, the sole existence, single truth mid falsehood, —well!
If the harsh throes of the prelude die not off into the swell
Of that perfect piece they sting me to become a-strain for,—if
Roughness of the long rock-clamber lead not to the last of cliff,
First of level country where is sward my pilgrim-foot can prize,—
Plainlier! if this life's conception new life fail to realize,—
Though earth burst and proved a bubble glassing hues of hell, one huge
Reflex of the devil's doings—God's work by no subterfuge—
(So death's kindly touch informed me as it broke the glamour, gave
Soul and body both release from life's long nightmare in the grave)
Still,—with no more Nature, no more Man as riddle to be read,
Only my own joys and sorrows now to reckon real instead,—

I must say—or choke in silence—"Howsoever came my fate,
Sorrow did and joy did nowise,—life well weighed,—preponderate."
By necessity ordained thus? I shall bear as best I can;
By a cause all-good, all-wise, all-potent? No, as I am man!
Such were God: and was it goodness that the good within my range
Or had evil in admixture or grew evil's self by change?
Wisdom—that becoming wise meant making slow and sure advance
From a knowledge proved in error to acknowledged ignorance?
Power? 't is just the main assumption reason most revolts at! power
Unavailing for bestowment on its creature of an hour,
Man, of so much proper action rightly aimed and reaching aim,
So much passion,—no defect there, no excess, but still the same,—
As what constitutes existence, pure perfection bright as brief
For yon worm, man's fellow-creature, on yon happier world—its leaf!
No, as I am man, I mourn the poverty I must impute:

Goodness, wisdom, power, all bounded, each a human attribute!

But, O world outspread beneath me! only for myself I speak,
Nowise dare to play the spokesman for my brothers strong and weak,
Full and empty, wise and foolish, good and bad, in every age,
Every clime, I turn my eyes from, as in one or other stage
Of a torture writhe they, Job-like couched on dung and crazed with blains
—Wherefore? whereto? ask the whirlwind what the dread voice thence explains!
I shall "vindicate no way of God's to man," nor stand apart,
"Laugh, be candid!" while I watch it traversing the human heart.
Traversed heart must tell its story uncommented on: no less
Mine results in "Only grant a second life, I acquiesce
In this present life as failure, count misfortune's worst assaults
Triumph, not defeat, assured that loss so much the more exalts

Gain about to be. For at what moment did I so advance
Near to knowledge as when frustrate of escape from ignorance?
Did not beauty prove most precious when its opposite obtained
Rule, and truth seem more than ever potent because falsehood reigned?
While for love—Oh how but, losing love, does whoso loves succeed
By the death-pang to the birth-throe—learning what is love indeed?
Only grant my soul may carry high through death her cup unspilled,
Brimming though it be with knowledge, life's loss drop by drop distilled,
I shall boast it mine—the balsam, bless each kindly wrench that wrung
From life's tree its inmost virtue, tapped the root whence pleasure sprung,
Barked the bole, and broke the bough, and bruised the berry, left all grace
Ashes in death's stern alembic, loosed elixir in its place!

Witness, Dear and True, how little I was 'ware of—not your worth

—That I knew, my heart assures me—but of what a shade on earth
Would the passage from my presence of the tall white figure throw
O'er the ways we walked together! Somewhat narrow, somewhat slow
Used to seem the ways, the walking: narrow ways are well to tread
When there 's moss beneath the footstep, honeysuckle overhead:
Walking slow to beating bosom surest solace soonest gives,
Liberates the brain o'erloaded—best of all restoratives.
Nay, do I forget the open vast where soon or late converged
Ways though winding?—world-wide heaven-high sea where music slept or surged
As the angel had ascendant, and Beethoven's Titan mace
Smote the immense to storm Mozart would by a finger's lifting chase?
Yes, I knew—but not with knowledge such as thrills me while I view
Yonder precinct which henceforward holds and hides the Dear and True.

Grant me (once again) assurance we shall each meet
each some day,
Walk—but with how bold a footstep! on a way—but
what a way!
—Worst were best, defeat were triumph, utter loss were
utmost gain.
Can it be, and must, and will it?

Silence! Out of fact's domain,
Just surmise prepared to mutter hope, and also fear—
dispute
Fact's inexorable ruling "Outside fact, surmise be mute!"
Well!
Ay, well and best, if fact's self I may force the
answer from!
'T is surmise I stop the mouth of. Not above in yonder
dome
All a rapture with its rose-glow,—not around, where pile
and peak
Strainingly await the sun's fall,—not beneath, where
crickets creak,
Birds assemble for their bed-time, soft the tree-top swell
subsides,—
No, nor yet within my deepest sentient self the know-
ledge hides.
Aspiration, reminiscence, plausibilities of trust

—Now the ready "Man were wronged else," now the rash
"and God unjust"—
None of these I need. Take thou, my soul, thy solitary
stand,
Umpire to the champions Fancy, Reason, as on either
hand
Amicable war they wage and play the foe in thy
behoof!
Fancy thrust and Reason parry! Thine the prize who
stand aloof.

FANCY.

I concede the thing refused: henceforth no certainty
more plain
Than this mere surmise that after body dies soul lives
again.
Two, the only facts acknowledged late, are now increased
to three—
God is, and the soul is, and, as certain, after death
shall be.
Put this third to use in life, the time for using fact!

REASON.

I do:
Find it promises advantage, coupled with the other two.

Life to come will be improvement on the life that 's now ; destroy
Body's thwartings, there 's no longer screen betwixt soul and soul's joy.
Why should we expect new hindrance, novel tether? In this first
Life, I see the good of evil, why our world began at worst :
Since time means amelioration, tardily enough displayed,
Yet a mainly onward moving, never wholly retrograde.
We know more though we know little, we grow stronger though still weak,
Partly see though all too purblind, stammer though we cannot speak.
There is no such grudge in God as scared the ancient Greek, no fresh
Substitute of trap for dragnet, once a breakage in the mesh.
Dragons were, and serpents are, and blindworms will be : ne'er emerged
Any new-created python for man's plague since earth was purged.
Failing proof, then, of invented trouble to replace the old,

O'er this life the next presents advantage much and manifold:
Which advantage—in the absence of a fourth and farther fact
Now conceivably surmised, of harm to follow from the act—
I pronounce for man's obtaining at this moment. Why delay?
Is he happy? happiness will change: anticipate the day!
Is he sad? there 's ready refuge: of all sadness death 's prompt cure!
Is he both, in mingled measure? cease a burthen to endure!
Pains with sorry compensations, pleasures stinted in the dole,
Power that sinks and pettiness that soars, all halved and nothing whole,
Idle hopes that lure man onward, forced back by as idle fears—
What a load he stumbles under through his glad sad seventy years,
When a touch sets right the turmoil, lifts his spirit where, flesh-freed,
Knowledge shall be rightly named so, all that seems be truth indeed!

Grant his forces no accession, nay, no faculty's increase,
Only let what now exists continue, let him prove in peace
Power whereof the interrupted unperfected play enticed
Man through darkness, which to lighten any spark of hope sufficed,—
What shall then deter his dying out of darkness into light?
Death itself perchance, brief pain that 's pang, condensed and infinite?
But at worst, he needs must brave it one day, while, at best, he laughs—
Drops a drop within his chalice, sleep not death his science quaffs!
Any moment claims more courage when, by crossing cold and gloom,
Manfully man quits discomfort, makes for the provided room
Where the old friends want their fellow, where the new acquaintance wait,
Probably for talk assembled, possibly to sup in state!
I affirm and re-affirm it therefore: only make as plain
As that man now lives, that, after dying, man will live again,—
Make as plain the absence, also, of a law to contravene

Voluntary passage from this life to that by change of scene,—
And I bid him—at suspicion of first cloud athwart his sky,
Flower's departure, frost's arrival—never hesitate, but die!

FANCY.

Then I double my concession: grant, along with new life sure,
This same law found lacking now: ordain that, whether rich or poor
Present life is judged in aught man counts advantage—be it hope,
Be it fear that brightens, blackens most or least his horoscope,—
He, by absolute compulsion such as made him live at all,
Go on living to the fated end of life whate'er befall.
What though, as on earth he darkling grovels, man descry the sphere,
Next life's—call it, heaven of freedom, close above and crystal-clear?
He shall find—say, hell to punish who in aught curtails the term,
Fain would act the butterfly before he has played out the worm.

God, soul, earth, heaven, hell,—five facts now: what is to desiderate?

REASON.

Nothing! Henceforth man's existence bows to the monition "Wait!
Take the joys and bear the sorrows—neither with extreme concern!
Living here means nescience simply: 't is next life that helps to learn.
Shut those eyes, next life will open,—stop those ears, next life will teach
Hearing's office,—close those lips, next life will give the power of speech!
Or, if action more amuse thee than the passive attitude,
Bravely bustle through thy being, busy thee for ill or good,
Reap this life's success or failure! Soon shall things be unperplexed
And the right and wrong, now tangled, lie unravelled in the next."

FANCY.

Not so fast! Still more concession! not alone do I declare

Life must needs be borne,—I also will that man become aware
Life has worth incalculable. every moment that he spends
So much gain or loss for that next life which on this life depends.
Good, done here, be there rewarded,—evil, worked here, there amerced!
Six facts now, and all established, plain to man the last as first.

REASON.

There was good and evil, then, defined to man by this decree?
Was—for at its promulgation both alike have ceased to be.
Prior to this last announcement "Certainly as God exists,
As He made man's soul, as soul is quenchless by the deathly mists,
Yet is, all the same, forbidden premature escape from time
To eternity's provided purer air and brighter clime,—
Just so certainly depends it on the use to which man turns

Earth, the good or evil done there, whether after death he earns
Life eternal,—heaven, the phrase be, or eternal death,—say, hell.
As his deeds, so proves his portion, doing ill or doing well "
—Prior to this last announcement, earth was man's probation-place:
Liberty of doing evil gave his doing good a grace;
Once lay down the law, with Nature's simple "Such effects succeed
Causes such, and heaven or hell depends upon man's earthly deed
Just as surely as depends the straight or else the crooked line
On his making point meet point or with or else without incline,"—
Thenceforth neither good nor evil does man, doing what he must.
Lay but down that law as stringent "Wouldst thou live again, be just!"
As this other "Wouldst thou live now, regularly draw thy breath!
For, suspend the operation, straight law's breach results in death—"
And (provided always, man, addressed this mode, be sound and sane)

Prompt and absolute obedience, never doubt, will law obtain!
Tell not me "Look round us! nothing each side but acknowledged law,
Now styled God's—now, Nature's edict!" Where 's obedience without flaw
Paid to either? What 's the adage rife in man's mouth? Why, "The best
I both see and praise, the worst I follow"—which, despite professed
Seeing, praising, all the same he follows, since he disbelieves
In the heart of him that edict which for truth his head receives.
There 's evading and persuading and much making law amends
Somehow, there 's the nice distinction 'twixt fast foes and faulty friends,
—Any consequence except inevitable death when "Die,
Whoso breaks our law!" they publish, God and Nature equally.
Law that 's kept or broken—subject to man's will and pleasure! Whence?
How comes law to bear eluding? Not because of impotence:
Certain laws exist already which to hear means to obey;

Therefore not without a purpose these man must, while those man may
Keep and, for the keeping, haply gain approval and reward.
Break through this last superstructure, all is empty air—no sward
Firm like my first fact to stand on "God there is, and soul there is,"
And soul's earthly life-allotment: wherein, by hypothesis,
Soul is bound to pass probation, prove its powers, and exercise
Sense and thought on fact, and then, from fact educing fit surmise,
Ask itself, and of itself have solely answer, "Does the scope
Earth affords of fact to judge by warrant future fear or hope?"

Thus have we come back full circle: fancy's footsteps one by one
Go their round conducting reason to the point where they begun,
Left where we were left so lately, Dear and True! When, half a week
Since, we walked and talked and thus I told you, how suffused a cheek

You had turned me had I sudden brought the blush into the smile
By some word like "Idly argued! you know better all the while!"
Now, from me—Oh not a blush but, how much more, a joyous glow,
Laugh triumphant, would it strike did your "Yes, better I do know"
Break, my warrant for assurance! which assurance may not be
If, supplanting hope, assurance needs must change this life to me.
So, I hope—no more than hope, but hope—no less than hope, because
I can fathom, by no plumb-line sunk in life's apparent laws,
How I may in any instance fix where change should meetly fall
Nor involve, by one revisal, abrogation of them all:
—Which again involves as utter change in life thus law-released,
Whence the good of goodness vanished when the ill of evil ceased.
Whereas, life and laws apparent re-instated,—all we know,

All we know not,—o'er our heaven again cloud closes, until, lo—
Hope the arrowy, just as constant, comes to pierce its gloom, compelled
By a power and by a purpose which, if no one else beheld,
I behold in life, so—hope!

Sad summing-up of all to say!
Athanasius contra mundum, why should he hope more than they?
So are men made notwithstanding, such magnetic virtue darts
From each head their fancy haloes to their unresisting hearts!

Here I stand, methinks a stone's throw from yon village I this morn
Traversed for the sake of looking one last look at its forlorn
Tenement's ignoble fortune: through a crevice, plain its floor
Piled with provender for cattle, while a dung-heap blocked the door.
In that squalid Bossex, under that obscene red roof, arose,

Like a fiery flying serpent from its egg, a soul—
Rousseau's.
Turn thence! Is it Diodati joins the glimmer of the
lake?
There I plucked a leaf, one week since,—ivy, plucked
for Byron's sake.
Famed unfortunates! And yet, because of that phos-
phoric fame
Swathing blackness' self with brightness till putridity
looked flame,
All the world was witched: and wherefore? what could
lie beneath, allure
Heart of man to let corruption serve man's head as cyno-
sure?
Was the magic in the dictum "All that 's good is gone
and past;
Bad and worse still grows the present, and the worst of
all comes last:
Which believe—for I believe it?" So preached one his
gospel-news;
While melodious moaned the other "Dying day with
dolphin-hues!
Storm, for loveliness and darkness like a woman's eye!
Ye mounts
Where I climb to 'scape my fellow, and thou sea wherein
he counts

Not one inch of vile dominion! What were your especial worth
Failed ye to enforce the maxim 'Of all objects found on earth
Man is meanest, much too honoured when compared with—what by odds
Beats him – any dog: so, let him go a-howling to his gods!'
Which believe—for I believe it!" such the comfort man received
Sadly since perforce he must: for why? the famous bard believed!

Fame! Then, give me fame, a moment! As I gather at a glance
Human glory after glory vivifying yon expanse,
Let me grasp them all together, hold on high and brandish well
Beacon-like above the rapt world ready, whether heaven or hell
Send the dazzling summons earthward, to submit itself the same,
Take on trust the hope or else despair flashed full on face by—Fame!
Thanks, thou pine-tree of Makistos, wide thy giant torch I wave!

Know ye whence I plucked the pillar, late with sky for architrave?
This the trunk, the central solid Knowledge, kindled core, began
Tugging earth-deeps, trying heaven-heights, rooted yonder at Lausanne.
This which flits and spits, the aspic,—sparkles in and out the boughs
Now, and now condensed, the python, coiling round and round allows
Scarce the bole its due effulgence, dulled by flake on flake of Wit—
Laughter so bejewels Learning,—what but Ferney nourished it?
Nay, nor fear—since every resin feeds the flame—that I dispense
With yon Bossex terebinth-tree's all-explosive Eloquence:
No, be sure! nor, any more than thy resplendency, Jean-Jacques,
Dare I want thine, Diodati! What though monkeys and macaques
Gibber "Byron"? Byron's ivy rears a branch beyond the crew,
Green for ever, no deciduous trash macaques and monkeys chew!

As Rousseau, then, eloquent, as Byron prime in poet's power,—
Detonations, fulgurations, smiles—the rainbow, tears—the shower,—
Lo, I lift the coruscating marvel—Fame! and, famed, declare
—Learned for the nonce as Gibbon, witty as wit's self Voltaire . . .
O the sorriest of conclusions to whatever man of sense
Mid the millions stands the unit, takes no flare for evidence!
Yet the millions have their portion, live their calm or troublous day,
Find significance in fireworks: so, by help of mine, they may
Confidently lay to heart and lock in head their life long —this:
"He there with the brand flamboyant, broad o'er night's forlorn abyss,
Crowned by prose and verse; and wielding, with Wit's bauble, Learning's rod . . .
Well? Why, he at least believed in Soul, was very sure of God.

So the poor smile played, that evening: pallid smile long since extinct
Here in London's mid-November! Not so loosely thoughts were linked,
Six weeks since as I, descending in the sunset from Salève,
Found the chain, I seemed to forge there, flawless till it reached your grave,—
Not so filmy was the texture, but I bore it in my breast
Safe thus far. And since I found a something in me would not rest
Till I, link by link, unravelled any tangle of the chain,
—Here it lies, for much or little! I have lived all o'er again
That last pregnant hour: I saved it, just as I could save a root
Disinterred for re-interment when the time best helps to shoot.
Life is stocked with germs of torpid life; but may I never wake
Those of mine whose resurrection could not be without earthquake!
Rest all such, unraised forever! Be this, sad yet sweet, the sole
Memory evoked from slumber! Least part this: then what the whole?

THE

TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

I.

Such a starved bank of moss
Till that May-morn,
Blue ran the flash across:
Violets were born!

II.

Sky—what a scowl of cloud
Till, near and far,
Ray on ray split the shroud
Splendid, a star!

III.

World—how it walled about
Life with disgrace
Till God's own smile came out:
That was thy face!

THE TWO POETS OF CROISIC.

1878.

I.

"FAME!" Yes, I said it and you read it. First,
Praise the good log-fire! Winter howls without.
Crowd closer, let us! Ha, the secret nursed
Inside yon hollow, crusted roundabout
With copper where the clamp was,—how the burst
Vindicates flame the stealthy feeder! Spout
Thy splendidest—a minute and no more?
So soon again all sobered as before?

II.

Nay, for I need to see your face! One stroke
Adroitly dealt, and lo, the pomp revealed!
Fire in his pandemonium, heart of oak
Palatial, where he wrought the works concealed

Beneath the solid-seeming roof I broke,
As redly up and out and off they reeled
Like disconcerted imps, those thousand sparks
From fire's slow tunnelling of vaults and arcs!

III.

Up, out, and off, see! Were you never used,—
You now, in childish days or rather nights,—
As I was, to watch sparks fly? not amused
By that old nurse-taught game which gave the sprites
Each one his title and career,—confused
Belief 't was all long over with the flights
From earth to heaven of hero, sage and bard,
And bade them once more strive for Fame's award?

IV.

New long bright life! and happy chance befell—
That I know—when some prematurely lost
Child of disaster bore away the bell
From some too-pampered son of fortune, crossed
Never before my chimney broke the spell!
Octogenarian Keats gave up the ghost,
While—never mind Who was it cumbered earth—
Sank stifled, span-long brightness, in the birth.

V.

Well, try a variation of the game!
Our log is old ship-timber, broken bulk.
There's sea-brine spirits up the brimstone flame,
That crimson-curly spiral proves the hulk
Was saturate with—ask the chloride's name
From somebody who knows! I shall not sulk
If yonder greenish tonguelet licked from brass
Its life, I thought was fed on copperas.

VI.

Anyhow, there they flutter! What may be
The style and prowess of that purple one?
Who is the hero other eyes shall see
Than yours and mine? That yellow, deep to dun—
Conjecture how the sage glows, whom not we
But those unborn are to get warmth by! Son
O' the coal,—as Job and Hebrew name a spark,—
What bard, in thy red soaring, scares the dark?

VII.

Oh and the lesser lights, the dearer still
That they elude a vulgar eye, give ours
The glimpse repaying astronomic skill
Which searched sky deeper, passed those patent powers

Constellate proudly,—swords, scrolls, harps, that fill
The vulgar eye to surfeit,—found best flowers
Hid deepest in the dark,—named unplucked grace
Of soul, ungathered beauty, form or face!

VIII.

Up with thee, mouldering ash men never knew,
But I know! flash thou forth, and figure bold,
Calm and columnar as yon flame I view!
Oh and I bid thee,—to whom fortune doled
Scantly all other gifts out—bicker blue,
Beauty for all to see, zinc's uncontrolled
Flake-brilliance! Not my fault if these were shown,
Grandeur and beauty both, to me alone.

IX.

No! as the first was boy's play, this proves mere
Stripling's amusement: manhood's sport be grave!
Choose rather sparkles quenched in mid career,
Their boldness and their brightness could not save
(In some old night of time on some lone drear
Sea-coast, monopolized by crag or cave)
—Save from ignoble exit into smoke,
Silence, oblivion, all death-damps that choke!

X.

Launched by our ship-wood, float we, once adrift
In fancy to that land-strip waters wash,
We both know well! Where uncouth tribes made shift
Long since to just keep life in, billows dash
Nigh over folk who shudder at each lift
Of the old tyrant tempest's whirlwind-lash
Though they have built the serviceable town
Tempests but tease now, billows drench, not drown.

XI.

Croisic, the spit of sandy rock which juts
Spitefully northward, bears nor tree nor shrub
To tempt the ocean, show what Guérande shuts
Behind her, past wild Batz whose Saxons grub
The ground for crystals grown where ocean gluts
Their promontory's breadth with salt: all stub
Of rock and stretch of sand, the land's last strife
To rescue a poor remnant for dear life.

XII.

And what life! Here was, from the world to choose,
The Druids' chosen chief of homes: they reared
—Only their women,—mid the slush and ooze
Of yon low islet,—to their sun, revered

In strange stone guise,—a temple. May-dawn dews
Saw the old structure levelled; when there peered
May's earliest eve-star, high and wide once more
Up towered the new pile perfect as before:

XIII.

Seeing that priestesses—and all were such—
Unbuilt and then rebuilt it every May,
Each alike helping—well, if not too much!
For, mid their eagerness to outstrip day
And get work done, if any loosed her clutch
And let a single stone drop, straight a prey
Herself fell, torn to pieces, limb from limb,
By sisters in full chorus glad and grim.

XIV.

And still so much remains of that grey cult,
That even now, of nights, do women steal
To the sole Menhir standing, and insult
The antagonistic church-spire by appeal
To power discrowned in vain, since each adult
Believes the gruesome thing she clasps may heal
Whatever plague no priestly help can cure:
Kiss but the cold stone, the event is sure!

XV.

Nay more: on May-morns, that primeval rite
Of temple-building, with its punishment
For rash precipitation, lingers, spite
Of all remonstrance; vainly are they shent,
Those girls who form a ring and, dressed in white,
Dance round it, till some sister's strength be spent:
Touch but the Menhir, straight the rest turn roughs
From gentles, fall on her with fisticuffs.

XVI.

Oh and, for their part, boys from door to door
Sing unintelligible words to tunes
As obsolete: "scraps of Druidic lore,"
Sigh scholars, as each pale man importunes
Vainly the mumbling to speak plain once more.
Enough of this old worship, rounds and runes!
They serve my purpose, which is but to show
Croisic to-day and Croisic long ago.

XVII.

What have we sailed to see, then, wafted there
By fancy from the log that ends its days
Of much adventure 'neath skies foul or fair,
On waters rough or smooth, in this good blaze

We two crouch round so closely, bidding care
Keep outside with the snow-storm? Something says
"Fit time for story-telling!" I begin—
Why not at Croisic, port we first put in?

XVIII.

Anywhere serves: for point me out the place
Wherever man has made himself a home,
And there I find the story of our race
In little, just at Croisic as at Rome.
What matters the degree? the kind I trace.
Druids their temple, Christians have their dome:
So with mankind; and Croisic, I 'll engage,
With Rome yields sort for sort, in age for age.

XIX.

No doubt, men vastly differ: and we need
Some strange exceptional benevolence
Of nature's sunshine to develop seed
So well, in the less-favoured clime, that thence
We may discern how shrub means tree indeed
Though dwarfed till scarcely shrub in evidence.
Man in the ice-house or the hot-house ranks
With beasts or gods: stove-forced, give warmth the thanks!

XX.

While, is there any ice-checked? Such shall learn
I am thankworthy, who propose to slake
His thirst for tasting how it feels to turn
Cedar from hyssop-on-the-wall. I wake
No memories of what is harsh and stern
In ancient Croisic-nature, much less rake
The ashes of her last warmth till out leaps
Live Hervé Riel, the single spark she keeps.

XXI.

Take these two, see, each outbreak,—spirt and spirt
Of fire from our brave billet's either edge
Which—call maternal Croisic ocean-girt!
These two shall thoroughly redeem my pledge.
One flames fierce gules, its feebler rival—vert,
Heralds would tell you: heroes, I allege,
They both were: soldiers, sailors, statesmen, priests,
Lawyers, physicians—guess what gods or beasts!

XXII.

None of them all, but—poets, if you please!
"What, even there, endowed with knack of rhyme,
Did two among the aborigines
Of that rough region pass the ungracious time

Suiting, to rumble-tumble of the sea's,
The songs forbidden a serener clime?
Or had they universal audience—that 's
To say, the folk of Croisic, ay and Batz?"

XXIII.

Open your ears! Each poet in his day
Had such a mighty moment of success
As pinnacled him straight, in full display,
For the whole world to worship—nothing less!
Was not the whole polite world Paris, pray?
And did not Paris, for one moment—yes,
Worship these poet-flames, our red and green,
One at a time, a century between?

XXIV.

And yet you never heard their names! Assist,
Clio, Historic Muse, while I record
Great deeds! Let fact, not fancy, break the mist
And bid each sun emerge, in turn play lord
Of day, one moment! Hear the annalist
Tell a strange story, true to the least word!
At Croisic, sixteen hundred years and ten
Since Christ, forth flamed yon liquid ruby, then.

XXV.

Know him henceforth as René Gentilhomme
—Appropriate appellation! noble birth
And knightly blazon, the device wherefrom
Was "Better do than say"! In Croisic's dearth
Why prison his career while Christendom
Lay open to reward acknowledged worth?
He therefore left it at the proper age
And got to be the Prince of Condé's page.

XXVI.

Which Prince of Condé, whom men called "The Duke,"
—Failing the king, his cousin, of an heir,
(As one might hold would hap, without rebuke,
Since Anne of Austria, all the world was 'ware,
Twenty-three years long sterile, scarce could look
For issue)—failing Louis of so rare
A godsend, it was natural the Prince
Should hear men call him "Next King" too, nor wince.

XXVII.

Now, as this reasonable hope, by growth
Of years, nay, tens of years, looked plump almost
To bursting,—would the brothers, childless both,
Louis and Gaston, give but up the ghost—

Condé, called "Duke" and 'Next King," nothing loth
Awaited his appointment to the post,
And wiled away the time, as best he might,
Till Providence should settle things aright.

XXVIII.

So, at a certain pleasure-house, withdrawn
From cities where a whisper breeds offence,
He sat him down to watch the streak of dawn
Testify to first stir of Providence;
And, since dull country life makes courtiers yawn,
There wanted not a poet to dispense
Song's remedy for spleen-fits all and some,
Which poet was Page René Gentilhomme.

XXIX.

A poet born and bred, his very sire
A poet also, author of a piece
Printed and published, "Ladies—their attire":
Therefore the son, just born at his decease,
Was bound to keep alive the sacred fire,
And kept it, yielding moderate increase
Of songs and sonnets, madrigals, and much
Rhyming thought poetry and praised as such.

XXX.

Rubbish unutterable (bear in mind!)
Rubbish not wholly without value, though,
Being to compliment the Duke designed
And bring the complimenter credit so,—
Pleasure with profit happily combined.
Thus René Gentilhomme rhymed, rhymed till—lo,
This happened, as he sat in an alcove
Elaborating rhyme for "love"—*not* "dove."

XXXI.

He was alone: silence and solitude
Befit the votary of the Muse. Around,
Nature—not our new picturesque and rude,
But trim tree-cinctured stately garden-ground—
Breathed polish and politeness. All-imbued
With these, he sat absorbed in one profound
Excogitation "Were it best to hint
Or boldly boast 'She loves me,—Araminte'?"

XXXII.

When suddenly flashed lightning, searing sight
Almost, so close to eyes; then, quick on flash,
Followed the thunder, splitting earth downright
Where René sat a-rhyming: with huge crash

Of marble into atoms infinite—
Marble which, stately, dared the world to dash
The stone-thing proud, high-pillared, from its place:
One flash, and dust was all that lay at base.

XXXIII.

So, when the horrible confusion loosed
Its wrappage round his senses, and, with breath,
Seeing and hearing by degrees induced
Conviction what he felt was life, not death—
His fluttered faculties came back to roost
One after one, as fowls do: ay, beneath,
About his very feet there, lay in dust
Earthly presumption paid by heaven's disgust.

XXXIV.

For, what might be the thunder-smitten thing
But, pillared high and proud, in marble guise,
A ducal crown – which meant "Now Duke: Next,
King"?
Since such the Prince was, not in his own eyes
Alone, but all the world's. Pebble from sling
Prostrates a giant; so can pulverize
Marble pretension—how much more, make moult
A peacock-prince his plume—God's thunderbolt.

XXXV.

That was enough for René, that first fact
Thus flashed into him. Up he looked: all blue
And bright the sky above; earth firm, compact
Beneath his footing, lay apparent too;
Opposite stood the pillar: nothing lacked
There, but the Duke's crown: see, its fragments strew
The earth,—about his feet lie atoms fine
Where he sat nursing late his fourteenth line!

XXXVI.

So, for the moment, all the universe
Being abolished, all 'twixt God and him,—
Earth's praise or blame, its blessing or its curse,
Of one and the same value,—to the brim
Flooded with truth for better or for worse,—
He pounces on the writing-paper, prim,
Keeping its place on table: not a dint
Nor speck had damaged "Ode to Araminte."

XXXVII.

And over the neat crowquill calligraph
His pen goes blotting, blurring, as an ox
Tramples a flower-bed in a garden,—laugh
You may!—so does not he, whose quick heart knocks

Audibly at his breast: an epitaph
On earth's break-up, amid the falling rocks,
He might be penning in a wild dismay,
Caught with his work half-done on Judgment Day.

XXXVIII.

And what is it so terribly he pens,
Ruining "Cupid, Venus, wile and smile,
Hearts, darts," and all his day's *divinior mens*
Judged necessary to a perfect style?
Little recks René, with a breast to cleanse,
Of Rhadamanthine law that reigned erewhile:
Brimful of truth, truth's outburst will convince
(Style or no style) who bears truth's brunt -- the Prince.

XXXIX.

"Condé, called 'Duke,' be called just 'Duke,' not more
To life's end! 'Next King' thou forsooth wilt be?
Ay, when this bauble, as it decked before
Thy pillar, shall again, for France to see,
Take its proud station there! Let France adore
No longer an illusive mock-sun — thee —
But keep her homage for Sol's self, about
To rise and put pretenders to the rout!

XL.

"What? France so God-abandoned that her root
Regal, though many a Spring it gave no sign,
Lacks power to make the bole, now branchless, shoot
Greenly as ever? Nature, though benign,
Thwarts ever the ambitious and astute.
In store for such is punishment condign:
Sure as thy Duke's crown to the earth was hurled,
So sure, next year, a Dauphin glads the world!"

XLI.

Which penned—some forty lines to this effect—
Our René folds his paper, marches brave
Back to the mansion, luminous, erect,
Triumphant, an emancipated slave.
There stands the Prince. "How now? My Duke's crown wrecked?
What may this mean?" The answer René gave
Was—handing him the verses, with the due
Incline of body: "Sir, God's word to you!"

XLII.

The Prince read, paled, was silent; all around,
The courtier-company, to whom he passed

The paper, read, in equal silence bound.
René grew also by degrees aghast
At his own fit of courage—palely found
Way of retreat from that pale presence: classed
Once more among the cony-kind. "Oh, son,
It is a feeble folk!" saith Solomon.

XLIII.

Vainly he apprehended evil: since,
When, at the year's end, even as foretold,
Forth came the Dauphin who discrowned the Prince
Of that long-craved mere visionary gold,
'T was no fit time for envy to evince
Malice, be sure! The timidest grew bold:
Of all that courtier-company not one
But left the semblance for the actual sun.

XLIV.

And all sorts and conditions that stood by
At René's burning moment, bright escape
Of soul, bore witness to the prophecy.
Which witness took the customary shape
Of verse; a score of poets in full cry
Hailed the inspired one. Nantes and Tours agape,
Soon Paris caught the infection; gaining strength,
How could it fail to reach the Court at length?

XLV.

"O poet!" smiled King Louis, "and besides,
O prophet! Sure, by miracle announced,
My babe will prove a prodigy. Who chides
Henceforth the unchilded monarch shall be trounced
For irreligion: since the fool derides
Plain miracle by which this prophet pounced
Exactly on the moment I should lift
Like Simeon, in my arms, a babe, 'God's gift!'

XLVI.

"So call the boy! and call this bard and seer
By a new title! him I raise to rank
Of 'Royal Poet:' poet without peer!
Whose fellows only have themselves to thank
If humbly they must follow in the rear
My René. He 's the master: they must clank
Their chains of song, confessed his slaves; for why?
They poetize, while he can prophesy!"

XLVII.

So said, so done; our René rose august,
"The Royal Poet;" straightway put in type
His poem-prophecy, and (fair and just
Procedure) added,—now that time was ripe

For proving friends did well his word to trust,—
Those attestations, tuned to lyre or pipe,
Which friends broke out with when he dared foretell
The Dauphin's birth: friends trusted, and did well.

XLVIII.

Moreover he got painted by Du Pré,
Engraved by Daret also, and prefixed
The portrait to his book: a crown of bay
Circled his brows, with rose and myrtle mixed;
And Latin verses, lovely in their way,
Described him as "the biforked hill betwixt:
Since he hath scaled Parnassus at one jump,
Joining the Delphic quill and Getic trump."

XLIX.

Whereof came . . . What, it lasts, our spirt, thus long
—The red fire? That 's the reason must excuse
My letting flicker René's prophet-song
No longer; for its pertinacious hues
Must fade before its fellow joins the throng
Of sparks departed up the chimney, dues
To dark oblivion. At the word, it winks,
Rallies, relapses, dwindles, deathward sinks!

L.

So does our poet. All this burst of fame,
Fury of favour, Royal Poetship,
Prophetship, book, verse, picture—thereof came
—Nothing! That 's why I would not let outstrip
Red his green rival flamelet: just the same
Ending in smoke waits both! In vain we rip
The past, no further faintest trace remains
Of René to reward our pious pains.

LI.

Somebody saw a portrait framed and glazed
At Croisic. "Who may be this glorified
Mortal unheard-of hitherto?" amazed
That person asked the owner by his side,
Who proved as ignorant. The question raised
Provoked inquiry; key by key was tried
On Croisic's portrait-puzzle, till back flew
The wards at one key's touch, which key was—Who?

LII.

The other famous poet! Wait thy turn.
Thou green, our red's competitor! Enough
Just now to note 't was he that itched to learn
(A hundred years ago) how fate could puff

Heaven-high (a hundred years before) then spurn
To suds so big a bubble in some huff:
Since green too found red's portrait,—having heard
Hitherto of red's rare self not one word.

LIII.

And he with zeal addressed him to the task
Of hunting out, by all and any means,
—Who might the brilliant bard be, born to bask
Butterfly-like in shine which kings and queens
And baby-dauphins shed? Much need to ask!
Is fame so fickle that what perks and preens
The eyed wing, one imperial minute, dips
Next sudden moment into blind eclipse?

LIV.

After a vast expenditure of pains,
Our second poet found the prize he sought:
Urged in his search by something that restrains
From undue triumph famed ones who have fought,
Or simply, poetizing, taxed their brains:
Something that tells such—dear is triumph bought
If it means only basking in the midst
Of fame's brief sunshine, as thou, René, didst.

LV.

For, what did searching find at last but this?
Quoth somebody "I somehow somewhere seem
To think I heard one old De Chevaye is
Or was possessed of René's works!" which gleam
Of light from out the dark proved not amiss
To track, by correspondence on the theme;
And soon the twilight broadened into day,
For thus to question answered De Chevaye.

LVI.

"True it is, I did once possess the works
You want account of—works—to call them so,—
Comprised in one small book: the volume lurks
(Some fifty leaves *in duodecimo*)
'Neath certain ashes which my soul it irks
Still to remember, because long ago
That and my other rare shelf-occupants
Perished by burning of my house at Nantes.

LVII.

"Yet of that book one strange particular
Still stays in mind with me"—and thereupon
Followed the story. "Few the poems are;
The book was two-thirds filled up with this one,

And sundry witnesses from near and far
That here at least was prophesying done
By prophet, so as to preclude all doubt,
Before the thing he prophesied about."

LVIII.

That's all he knew, and all the poet learned,
And all that you and I are like to hear
Of René; since not only book is burned
But memory extinguished,—nay, I fear,
Portrait is gone too: nowhere I discerned
A trace of it at Croisic. "Must a tear
Needs fall for that?" you smile. "How fortune fares
With such a mediocrity, who cares?"

LIX.

Well, I care—intimately care to have
Experience how a human creature felt
In after-life, who bore the burden grave
Of certainly believing God had dealt
For once directly with him: did not rave
—A maniac, did not find his reason melt
—An idiot, but went on, in peace or strife,
The world's way, lived an ordinary life.

LX.

How many problems that one fact would solve!
An ordinary soul, no more, no less,
About whose life earth's common sights revolve,
On whom is brought to bear, by thunder-stress,
This fact—God tasks him, and will not absolve
Task's negligent performer! Can you guess
How such a soul,—the task performed to point,—
Goes back to life nor finds things out of joint?

LXI.

Does he stand stock-like henceforth? or proceed
Dizzily, yet with course straightforward still,
Down-trampling vulgar hindrance?—as the reed
Is crushed beneath its tramp when that blind will
Hatched in some old-world beast's brain bids it speed
Where the sun wants brute-presence to fulfil
Life's purpose in a new far zone, ere ice
Enwomb the pasture-tract its fortalice

LXII.

I think no such direct plain truth consists
With actual sense and thought and what they take
To be the solid walls of life: mere mists —
How such would, at that truth's first piercing, break

Into the nullity they are!—slight lists
Wherein the puppet-champions wage, for sake
Of some mock-mistress, mimic war: laid low
At trumpet-blast, there 's shown the world, one foe!

LXIII.

No, we must play the pageant out, observe
The tourney regulations, and regard
Success—to meet the blunted spear nor swerve,
Failure—to break no bones yet fall on sward;
Must prove we have—not courage? well then,—nerve!
And, at the day's end, boast the crown's award—
Be warranted as promising to wield
Weapons, no sham, in a true battle-field.

LXIV.

Meantime, our simulated thunderclaps
Which tell us counterfeited truths—these same
Are—sound, when music storms the soul, perhaps?
—Sight, beauty, every dart of every aim
That touches just, then seems, by strange relapse,
To fall effectless from the soul it came
As if to fix its own, but simply smote
And startled to vague beauty more remote?

LXV.

So do we gain enough—yet not too much—
Acquaintance with that outer element
Wherein there 's operation (call it such !)
Quite of another kind than we the pent
On earth are proper to receive. Our hutch
Lights up at the least chink : let roof be rent—
How inmates huddle, blinded at first spasm,
Cognizant of the sun's self through the chasm !

LXVI.

Therefore, who knows if this our René's quick
Subsidence from as sudden noise and glare
Into oblivion was impolitic ?
No doubt his soul became at once aware
That, after prophecy, the rhyming-trick
Is poor employment : human praises scare
Rather than soothe ears all a-tingle yet
With tones few hear and live, but none forget.

LXVII.

There 's our first famous poet. Step thou forth
Second consummate songster ! See, the tongue
Of fire that typifies thee, owns thy worth
In yellow, purple mixed its green among,

No pure and simple resin from the North,
But composite with virtues that belong
To Southern culture! Love not more than hate
Helped to a blaze . . . But I anticipate.

LXVIII.

Prepare to witness a combustion rich
And riotously splendid, far beyond
Poor René's lambent little streamer which
Only played candle to a Court grown fond
By baby-birth: this soared to such a pitch,
Alternately such colours doffed and donned,
That when I say it dazzled Paris—please
Know that it brought Voltaire upon his knees!

LXIX.

Who did it, was a dapper gentleman,
Paul Desforges Maillard, Croisickese by birth,
Whose birth that century ended which began
By similar bestowment on our earth
Of the aforesaid René. Cease to scan
The ways of Providence! See Croisic's dearth—
Not Paris in its plenitude—suffice
To furnish France with her best poet twice!

LXX.

Till he was thirty years of age, the vein
Poetic yielded rhyme by drops and spirts:
In verses of society had lain
His talent chiefly; but the Muse asserts
Privilege most by treating with disdain
Epics the bard mouths out, or odes he blurts
Spasmodically forth. Have people time
And patience nowadays for thought in rhyme?

LXXI.

So, his achievements were the quatrain's inch
Of homage, or at most the sonnet's ell
Of admiration: welded lines with clinch
Of ending word and word, to every belle
In Croisic's bounds; these, brisk as any finch,
He twittered till his fame had reached as well
Guérande as Batz; but there fame stopped, for—curse
On fortune—outside lay the universe!

LXXII.

That 's Paris. Well,—why not break bounds, and send
Song onward till it echo at the gates
Of Paris whither all ambitions tend,
And end too, seeing that success there sates

The soul which hungers most for fame? Why spend
A minute in deciding, while, by Fate's
Decree, there happens to be just the prize
Proposed there, suiting souls that poetize?

LXXIII.

A prize indeed, the Academy's own self
Proposes to what bard shall best indite
A piece describing how, through shoal and shelf,
The Art of Navigation, steered aright,
Has, in our last king's reign,—the lucky elf,—
Reached, one may say, Perfection's haven quite,
And there cast anchor. At a glance one sees
The subject's crowd of capabilities!

LXXIV.

Neptune and Amphitrité! Thetis, who
Is either Tethys or as good—both tag!
Triton can shove along a vessel too:
It 's Virgil! Then the winds that blow or lag,—
De Maille, Vendôme, Vermandois! Toulouse blew
Longest, we reckon: he must puff the flag
To fullest outflare; while our lacking nymph
Be Anne of Austria. Regent o'er the lymph

LXXV.

Promised, performed! Since *irritabilis gens*
Holds of the feverish impotence that strives
To stay an itch by prompt resource to pen's
Scratching itself on paper; placid lives,
Leisurely works mark the *divinior mens:*
Bees brood above the honey in their hives;
Gnats are the busy bustlers. Splash and scrawl,—
Completed lay thy piece, swift penman Paul!

LXXVI.

To Paris with the product! This despatched,
One had to wait the Forty's slow and sure
Verdict, as best one might. Our penman scratched
Away perforce the itch that knows no cure
But daily paper-friction: more than matched
His first feat by a second – tribute pure
And heartfelt to the Forty when their voice
Should peal with one accord "Be Paul our choice!"

LXXVII.

Scratch, scratch went much laudation of that sane
And sound Tribunal, delegates august
Of Phœbus and the Muses' sacred train—
Whom every poetaster tries to thrust

From where, high-throned, they dominate the Seine:
Fruitless endeavour,—fail it shall and must!
Whereof in witness have not one and all
The Forty voices pealed "Our Choice be Paul"?

LXXVIII.

Thus Paul discounted his applause. Alack
For human expectation! Scarcely ink
Was dry when, lo, the perfect piece came back
Rejected, shamed! Some other poet's clink
"Thetis and Tethys" had seduced the pack
Of pedants to declare perfection's pink
A singularly poor production. "Whew!
The Forty are stark fools, I always knew."

LXXIX.

First fury over (for Paul's race—to-wit,
Brain-vibrios—wriggle clear of protoplasm
Into minute life that 's one fury-fit),
"These fools shall find a bard's enthusiasm
Comports with what should counterbalance it—
Some knowledge of the world! No doubt, orgasm
Effects the birth of verse which, born, demands
Prosaic ministration, swaddling-bands!

LXXX.

"Verse must be cared for at this early stage,
Handled, nay dandled even. I should play
Their game indeed if, till it grew of age,
I meekly let these dotards frown away
My bantling from the rightful heritage
Of smiles and kisses! Let the public say
If it be worthy praises or rebukes,
My poem, from these Forty old perukes!"

LXXXI.

So, by a friend, who boasts himself in grace
With no less than the Chevalier La Roque,—
Eminent in those days for pride of place,
Seeing he had it in his power to block
The way or smooth the road to all the race
Of literators trudging up to knock
At Fame's exalted temple-door—for why?
He edited the Paris "Mercury":—

LXXXII.

By this friend's help the Chevalier receives
Paul's poem, prefaced by the due appeal
To Cæsar from the Jews. As duly heaves
A sigh the Chevalier, about to deal

With ease so customary—turns the leaves,
Finds nothing there to borrow, beg or steal—
Then brightens up the critic's brow deep-lined.
"The thing may be so cleverly declined!"

LXXXIII.

Down to desk, out with paper, up with quill,
Dip and indite! "Sir, gratitude immense
For this true draught from the Pierian rill!
Our Academic clodpoles must be dense
Indeed to stand unirrigated still.
No less, we critics dare not give offence
To grandees like the Forty: while we mock
We grin and bear. So, here's your piece! La Roque.

LXXXIV.

"There now!" cries Paul: "the fellow can't avoid
Confessing that my piece deserves the palm;
And yet he dares not grant me space enjoyed
By every scribbler he permits embalm
His crambo in the Journal's corner! Cloyed
With stuff like theirs, no wonder if a qualm
Be caused by verse like mine: though that's no cause
For his defrauding me of just applause.

LXXXV.

"Aha, he fears the Forty, this poltroon?
First let him fear *me!* Change smooth speech to rough!
I 'll speak my mind out, show the fellow soon
Who is the foe to dread: insist enough
On my own merits till, as clear as noon,
He sees I am no man to take rebuff
As patiently as scribblers may and must!
Quick to the onslaught, out sword, cut and thrust!"

LXXXVI.

And thereupon a fierce epistle flings
Its challenge in the critic's face. Alack!
Our bard mistakes his man! The gauntlet rings
On brazen visor proof against attack.
Prompt from his editorial throne up springs
The insulted magnatè, and his mace falls, thwack,
On Paul's devoted brainpan,—quite away
From common courtesies of fencing-play!

LXXXVII.

"Sir, will you have the truth? This piece of yours
Is simply execrable past belief.
I shrank from saying so; but, since nought cures
Conceit but truth, truth 's at your service! Brief,

Just so long as 'The Mercury' endures,
So long are you excluded by its Chief
From corner, nay, from cranny! Play the cock
O' the roost, henceforth, at Croisic!" wrote La Roque.

LXXXVIII.

Paul yellowed, whitened, as his wrath from red
Waxed incandescent. Now, this man of rhyme
Was merely foolish, faulty in the head
Not heart of him: conceit 's a venial crime.
"Oh by no means malicious!" cousins said:
Fussily feeble,—harmless all the time,
Piddling at so-called satire—well-advised,
He held in most awe whom he satirized.

LXXXIX.

Accordingly his kith and kin—removed
From emulation of the poet's gift
By power and will—these rather liked, nay, loved
The man who gave his family a lift
Out of the Croisic level; "disapproved
Satire so trenchant." Thus our poet sniffed
Home-incense, though too churlish to unlock
"The Mercury's" box of ointment was La Roque.

XC.

But when Paul's visage grew from red to white,
And from his lips a sort of mumbling fell
Of who was to be kicked,—"And serve him right"—
A gay voice interposed—"did kicking well
Answer the purpose! Only—if I might
Suggest as much—a far more potent spell
Lies in another kind of treatment. Oh,
Women are ready at resource, you know!

XCI.

"Talent should minister to genius! Good:
The proper and superior smile returns.
Hear me with patience! Have you understood
The only method whereby genius earns
Fit guerdon nowadays? In knightly mood
You entered lists with visor up; one learns
Too late that, had you mounted Roland's crest,
'Room!' they had roared –La Roque with all the rest!

XCII.

"Why did you first of all transmit your piece
To those same priggish Forty unprepared
Whether to rank you with the swans or geese
By friendly intervention? If they dared

Count you a cackler,—wonders never cease!
I think it still more wondrous that you bared
Your brow (my earlier image) as if praise
Were gained by simple fighting nowadays!

XCIII.

"Your next step showed a touch of the true means
Whereby desert is crowned: not force but wile
Came to the rescue. 'Get behind the scenes!'
Your friend advised: he writes, sets forth your style
And title, to such purpose intervenes
That you get velvet-compliment three-pile;
And, though 'The Mercury' said 'nay,' nor stock
Nor stone did his refusal prove La Roque.

XCIV.

"Why must you needs revert to the high hand,
Imperative procedure—what you call
'Taking on merit your exclusive stand'?
Stand, with a vengeance! Soon you went to wall,
You and your merit! Only fools command
When folk are free to disobey them, Paul!
You 've learnt your lesson, found out what 's o'clock,
By this uncivil answer of La Roque.

XCV.

"Now let me counsel! Lay this piece on shelf
—Masterpiece though it be! From out your desk
Hand me some lighter sample, verse the elf
Cupid inspired you with, no god grotesque
Presiding o'er the Navy! I myself
Hand-write what 's legible yet picturesque;
I 'll copy fair and femininely frock
Your poem masculine that courts La Roque!

XCVI.

"Deïdamia he—Achilles thou!
Ha, ha, these ancient stories come so apt!
My sex, my youth, my rank I next avow
In a neat prayer for kind perusal. Sapped
I see the walls which stand so stoutly now!
I see the toils about the game entrapped
By honest cunning! Chains of lady's-smock,
Not thorn and thistle, tether fast La Roque!"

XCVII.

Now, who might be the speaker sweet and arch
That laughed above Paul's shoulder as it heaved
With the indignant heart?—bade steal a march
And not continue charging? Who conceived

This plan which set our Paul, like pea you parch
On fire-shovel, skipping, of a load relieved,
From arm-chair moodiness to escritoire
Sacred to Phœbus and the tuneful choir?

XCVIII.

Who but Paul's sister! named of course like him
"Desforges"; but, mark you, in those days a queer
Custom obtained,—who knows whence grew the whim?—
That people could not read their title clear
To reverence till their own true names, made dim
By daily mouthing, pleased to disappear,
Replaced by brand-new bright ones: Arouet,
For instance, grew Voltaire; Desforges Malcrais.

XCIX.

"Demoiselle Malcrais de la Vigne"--because
The family possessed at Brederac
A vineyard,—few grapes, many hips-and-haws,—
Still a nice Breton name. As breast and back
Of this vivacious beauty gleamed through gauze,
So did her sprightly nature nowise lack
Lustre when draped, the fashionable way,
In "Malcrais de la Vigne"—more short, "Malcrais."

C.

Out from Paul's escritoire behold escape
The hoarded treasure! verse falls thick and fast,
Sonnets and songs of every size and shape.
The lady ponders on her prize; at last
Selects one which—Oh angel and yet ape!—
Her malice thinks is probably surpassed
in badness by no fellow of the flock,
Copies it fair, and "Now for my La Roque!"

CI.

So, to him goes, with the neat manuscript,
The soft petitionary letter. "Grant
A fledgeling novice that with wing unclipt
She soar her little circuit, habitant
Of an old manor; buried in which crypt,
How can the youthful châtelaine but pant
For disemprisonment by one *ad hoc*
Appointed 'Mercury's' Editor, La Roque?"

CII.

'T was an epistle that might move the Turk!
More certainly it moved our middle-aged
Pen-driver drudging at his weary work,
Raked the old ashes up and disengaged

The sparks of gallantry which always lurk
Somehow in literary breasts, assuaged
In no degree by compliments on style;
Are Forty wagging beards worth one girl's smile?

CIII.

In trips the lady's poem, takes its place
Of honour in the gratified Gazette,
With due acknowledgment of power and grace;
Prognostication, too, that higher yet
The Breton Muse will soar: fresh youth, high race,
Beauty and wealth have amicably met
That Demoiselle Malcrais may fill the chair
Left vacant by the loss of Deshoulières.

CIV.

"There!" cried the lively lady. "Who was right—
You in the dumps, or I the merry maid
Who know a trick or two can baffle spite
Tenfold the force of this old fool's? Afraid
Of Editor La Roque? But come! next flight
Shall outsoar—Deshoulières alone? My blade,
Sappho herself shall you confess outstript!
Quick, Paul, another dose of manuscript!"

CV.

And so, once well a-foot, advanced the game:
More and more verses, corresponding gush
On gush of praise, till everywhere acclaim
Rose to the pitch of uproar. "Sappho? Tush!
Sure 'Malcrais on her Parrot' puts to shame
Deshoulières' pastoral, clay not worth a rush
Beside this find of treasure, gold in crock,
Unearthed in Brittany,—nay, ask La Roque!"

CVI.

Such was the Paris tribute. "Yes," you sneer,
"Ninnies stock Noodledom, but folk more sage
Resist contagious folly, never fear!"
Do they? Permit me to detach one page
From the huge Album which from far and near
Poetic praises blackened in a rage
Of rapture! and that page shall be—who stares
Confounded now, I ask you?—just Voltaire's!

CVII.

Ay, sharpest shrewdest steel that ever stabbed
To death Imposture through the armour-joints!
How did it happen that gross Humbug grabbed
Thy weapons, gouged thine eyes out? Fate appoints

That pride shall have a fall, or I had blabbed
Hardly that Humbug, whom thy soul aroints,
Could thus cross-buttock thee caught unawares,
And dismalest of tumbles proved—Voltaire's!

CVIII.

See his epistle extant yet, wherewith
"Henri" in verse and "Charles" in prose he sent
To do her suit and service! Here's the pith
Of half a dozen stanzas—stones which went
To build that simulated monolith—
Sham love in due degree with homage blent
As sham—which in the vast of volumes scares
The traveller still: "That stucco-heap—Voltaire's?"

CIX.

"Oh thou, whose clarion-voice has overflown
The wilds to startle Paris that's one ear!
Thou who such strange capacity hast shown
For joining all that's grand with all that's dear,
Knowledge with power to please—Deshoulières grown
Learned as Dacier in thy person! mere
Weak fruit of idle hours, these crabs of mine
I dare lay at thy feet, O Muse divine!

CX.

"Charles was my taskwork only; Henri trod
My hero erst; and now, my heroine—she
Shall be thyself! True—is it true, great God?
Certainly love henceforward must not be!
Yet all the crowd of Fine Arts fail—how odd!—
Tried turn by turn, to fill a void in me!
There 's no replacing love with these, alas!
Yet all I can I do to prove no ass.

CXI.

"I labour to amuse my freedom; but
Should any sweet young creature slavery preach,
And—borrowing thy vivacious charm, the slut!—
Make me, in thy engaging words, a speech,
Soon should I see myself in prison shut
With all imaginable pleasure." Reach
The washhand-basin for admirers! There 's
A stomach-moving tribute—and Voltaire's!

CXII.

Suppose it a fantastic billet-doux,
Adulatory flourish, not worth frown!
What say you to the Fathers of Trévoux?
These in their Dictionary have her down

Under the heading "Author": "Malcrais, too,
Is 'Author' of much verse that claims renown."
While Jean-Baptiste Rousseau . . . but why proceed?
Enough of this—something too much, indeed!

CXIII.

At last La Roque, unwilling to be left
Behindhand in the rivalry, broke bounds
Of figurative passion; hilt and heft,
Plunged his huge downright love through what surrounds
The literary female bosom; reft
Away its veil of coy reserve with "Zounds!
I love thee, Breton Beauty! All 's no use!
Body and soul I love,—the big word 's loose!"

CXIV.

He 's greatest now and to de-struc-ti-on
Nearest. Attend the solemn word I quote,
O Paul! *There 's no pause at per-fec-ti-on.*
Thus knolls thy knell the Doctor's bronzed throat!
Greatness a period hath, no sta-ti-on!
Better and truer verse none ever wrote
(Despite the antique outstretched *a-i-on*)
Than thou, revered and magisterial Donne!

CXV.

Flat on his face, La Roque, and,—pressed to heart
His dexter hand,—Voltaire with bended knee!
Paul sat and sucked-in triumph; just apart
Leaned over him his sister. "Well!" smirks he,
And "Well?" she answers, smiling—woman's art
To let a man's own mouth, not hers, decree
What shall be next move which decides the game:
Success? She said so. Failure? His the blame.

CXVI.

"Well!" this time forth affirmatively comes
With smack of lip, and long-drawn sigh through teeth
Close clenched o'er satisfaction, as the gums
Were tickled by a sweetmeat teased beneath
Palate by lubricating tongue: "Well! crumbs
Of comfort these, undoubtedly! no death
Likely from famine at Fame's feast! 't is clear
I may put claim in for my pittance, Dear!

CXVII.

"La Roque, Voltaire, my lovers! Then disguise
Has served its turn, grows idle; let it drop!
I shall to Paris, flaunt there in men's eyes
My proper manly garb and mount a-top

The pedestal that waits me, take the prize
Awarded Hercules. He threw a sop
To Cerberus who let him pass, you know,
Then, following, licked his heels: exactly so!

CXVIII.

"I like the prospect—their astonishment,
Confusion: wounded vanity, no doubt,
Mixed motives; how I see the brows quick bent!
'What, sir, yourself, none other, brought about
This change of estimation? Phœbus sent
His shafts as from Diana?' Critic pout
Turns courtier smile: 'Lo, him we took for her!
Pleasant mistake! You bear no malice, sir?'

CXIX.

"Eh, my Diana?" But Diana kept
Smilingly silent with fixed needle-sharp
Much-meaning eyes that seemed to intercept
Paul's very thoughts ere they had time to warp
From earnest into sport the words they leapt
To life with—changed as when maltreated harp
Renders in tinkle what some player-prig
Means for a grave tune though it proves a jig.

CXX.

"What, Paul, and are my pains thus thrown away,
My lessons end in loss?" at length [illegible]low
The pitying syllables, her lips allay
The satire of by keeping in full flow,
Above their coral reef, bright smiles at play:
"Can it be, Paul thus fails to rightly know
And altogether estimate applause
As just so many asinine hee-haws?

CXXI.

"I thought to show you". . . "Show me," Paul in-broke
"My poetry is rubbish, and the world
That rings with my renown a sorry joke!
What fairer test of worth than that, form furled,
I entered the arena? Yet you croak
Just as if Phœbé and not Phœbus hurled
The dart and struck the Python! What, he crawls
Humbly in dust before your feet, not Paul's?

CXXII.

"Nay, 't is no laughing matter though absurd
If there 's an end of honesty on earth!
La Roque sends letters, lying every word!
Voltaire makes verse, and of himself makes mirth

To the remotest age! Rousseau 's the third
Who, driven to despair amid such dearth
Of people that [illegible] praising, finds no one
More fit to praise than Paul the simpleton!

CXXIII.

"Somebody says—if a man writes at all
It is to show the writer's kith and kin
He was unjustly thought a natural;
And truly, sister, I have yet to win
Your favourable word, it seems, for Paul
Whose poetry you count not worth a pin
Though well enough esteemed by these Voltaires,
Rousseaus and suchlike: let them quack, who cares?"

CXXIV.

"—To Paris with you, Paul! Not one word's waste
Further: my scrupulosity was vain!
Go triumph! Be my foolish fears effaced
From memory's record! Go, to come again
With glory crowned,—by sister re-embraced,
Cured of that strange delusion of her brain
Which led her to suspect that Paris gloats
On male limbs mostly when in petticoats!"

CXXV.

So laughed her last word, with the little touch
Of malice proper to the outraged pride
Of any artist in a work too much
Shorn of its merits. "By all means be tried
The opposite procedure! Cast your crutch
Away, no longer crippled, nor divide
The credit of your march to the World's Fair
With sister Cherry-cheeks who helped you there!"

CXXVI.

Crippled, forsooth! what courser sprightlier pranced
Paris-ward than did Paul? Nay, dreams lent wings:
He flew, or seemed to fly, by dreams entranced.
Dreams? wide-awake realities: no things
Dreamed merely were the missives that advanced
The claim of Malcrais to consort with kings
Crowned by Apollo—not to say with queens
Cinctured by Venus for Idalian scenes.

CXXVII.

Soon he arrives, forthwith is found before
The outer gate of glory. Bold tic-toc
Announces there 's a giant at the door.
"Ay, sir, here dwells the Chevalier La Roque."

"Lackey! Malcrais,—mind, no word less nor more!—
Desires his presence. I've unearthed the brock:
Now, to transfix him!" There stands Paul erect,
Inched out his uttermost, for more effect.

CXXVIII.

A bustling entrance: "Idol of my flame!
Can it be that my heart attains at last
Its longing? that you stand, the very same
As in my visions? . . . Ha! hey, how?" aghast
Stops short the rapture. "Oh, my boy's to blame!
You merely are the messenger! Too fast
My fancy rushed to a conclusion. Pooh!
Well, sir, the lady's substitute is—who?"

CXXIX.

Then Paul's smirk grows inordinate. "Shake hands!
Friendship not love awaits you, master mine,
Though nor Malcrais nor any mistress stands
To meet your ardour! So, you don't divine
Who wrote the verses wherewith ring the land's
Whole length and breadth? Just he whereof no line
Had ever leave to blot your Journal—eh?
Paul Desforges Maillard—otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXX.

And there the two stood, stare confronting mirk,
Awhile uncertain which should yield the *pas*.
In vain the Chevalier beat brain for quirk
To help in this conjuncture; at length "Bah!
Boh! Since I've made myself a fool, why shirk
The punishment of folly? Ha, ha, ha,
Let me return your handshake!" Comic sock
For tragic buskin prompt thus changed La Roque.

CXXXI.

"I 'm nobody—a wren-like journalist;
You 've flown at higher game and winged your bird,
The golden eagle! That 's the grand acquist!
Voltaire's sly Muse, the tiger-cat, has purred
Prettily round your feet; but if she missed
Priority of stroking, soon were stirred
The dormant spit-fire. To Voltaire! away,
Paul Desforges Maillard, otherwise Malcrais!"

CXXXII.

Whereupon, arm in arm, and head in air,
The two begin their journey. Need I say,
La Roque had felt the talon of Voltaire,
Had a long-standing little debt to pay,

And pounced, you may depend, on such a rare
Occasion for its due discharge? So, gay
And grenadier-like, marching to assault,
They reach the enemy's abode, there halt.

CXXXIII.

"I 'll be announcer!" quoth La Roque: "I know,
Better than you, perhaps, my Breton bard,
How to procure an audience! He 's not slow
To smell a rat, this scamp Voltaire! Discard
The petticoats too soon,—you 'll never show
Your *haut-de-chausses* and all they 've made or marred
In your true person. Here 's his servant. Pray,
Will the great man see Demoiselle Malcrais?"

CXXXIV.

Now, the great man was also, no whit less,
The man of self-respect,—more great man he!
And bowed to social usage, dressed the dress,
And decorated to the fit degree
His person; 't was enough to bear the stress
Of battle in the field, without, when free
From outside foes, inviting friends' attack
By—sword in hand? No,—ill-made coat on back!

CXXXV.

And, since the announcement of his visitor
Surprised him at his toilet,—never glass
Had such solicitation! "Black, now—or
Brown be the killing wig to wear? Alas,
Where 's the rouge gone, this cheek were better for
A tender touch of? Melted to a mass,
All my pomatum! There 's at all events
A devil—for he 's got among my scents!"

CXXXVI.

So, "barbered ten times o'er," as Antony
Paced to his Cleopatra, did at last
Voltaire proceed to the fair presence: high
In colour, proud in port, as if a blast
Of trumpet bade the world "Take note! draws nigh
To Beauty, Power! Behold the Iconoclast,
The Poet, the Philosopher, the Rod
Of iron for imposture! Ah my God!"

CXXXVII.

For there stands smirking Paul, and—what lights fierce
The situation as with sulphur flash—
There grinning stands La Roque! No carte-and-tierce
Observes the grinning fencer, but, full dash

From breast to shoulderblade, the thrusts transpierce
That armour against which so idly clash
The swords of priests and pedants! Victors there,
Two smirk and grin who have befooled—Voltaire!

CXXXVIII.

A moment's horror; then quick turn-about
On high-heeled shoe,—flurry of ruffles, flounce
Of wig-ties and of coat-tails,—and so out
Of door banged wrathfully behind, goes—bounce—
Voltaire in tragic exit! vows, no doubt,
Vengeance upon the couple. Did he trounce
Either, in point of fact? His anger's flash
Subsided if a culprit craved his cash.

CXXXIX.

As for La Roque, he having laughed his laugh
To heart's content,—the joke defunct at once,
Dead in the birth, you see,—its epitaph
Was sober earnest. "Well, sir, for the nonce,
You 've gained the laurel; never hope to graff
A second sprig of triumph there! Ensconce
Yourself again at Croisic: let it be
Enough you mastered both Voltaire and—me!

CXL.

"Don't linger here in Paris to parade
Your victory, and have the very boys
Point at you! 'There 's the little mouse which made
Believe those two big lions that its noise,
Nibbling away behind the hedge, conveyed
Intelligence that—portent which destroys
All courage in the lion's heart, with horn
That 's fable—there lay couched the unicorn!'

CXLI.

"Beware us, now we 've found who fooled us! Quick
To cover! 'In proportion to men's fright,
Expect their fright's revenge!' quoth politic
Old Macchiavelli. As for me,—all 's right:
I 'm but a journalist. But no pin's prick
The tooth leaves when Voltaire is roused to bite!
So, keep your counsel, I advise! Adieu!
Good journey! Ha, ha, ha, Malcrais was—you!"

CXLII.

"—Yes, I 'm Malcrais, and somebody beside,
You snickering monkey!" thus winds up the tale
Our hero, safe at home, to that black-eyed
Cherry-cheeked sister, as she soothes the pale

Mortified poet. "Let their worst be tried,
I'm their match henceforth—very man and male!
Don't talk to me of knocking-under! man
And male must end what petticoats began!

CXLIII.

"How woman-like it is to apprehend
The world will eat its words! why, words transfixed
To stone, they stare at you in print,—at end,
Each writer's style and title! Choose betwixt
Fool and knave for his name, who should intend
To perpetrate a baseness so unmixed
With prospect of advantage! What is writ
Is writ: they 've praised me, there 's an end of it.

CXLIV.

"No, Dear, allow me! I shall print these same
Pieces, with no omitted line, as Paul's.
Malcrais no longer, let me see folk blame
What they—praised simply?—placed on pedestals,
Each piece a statue in the House of Fame!
Fast will they stand there, though their presence galls
The envious crew: such show their teeth, perhaps
And snarl, but never bite! I know the chaps!"

CXLV.

Oh Paul, oh piteously deluded! Pace
Thy sad sterility of Croisic flats,
Watch, from their southern edge, the foamy race
Of high-tide as it heaves the drowning mats
Of yellow-berried web-growth from their place,
The rock-ridge, when, rolling as far as Batz,
One broadside crashes on it, and the crags,
That needle under, stream with weedy rags!

CXLVI.

Or, if thou wilt, at inland Bergerac,
Rude heritage but recognized domain,
Do as two here are doing: make hearth crack
With logs until thy chimney roar again
Jolly with fire-glow! Let its angle lack
No grace of Cherry-cheeks thy sister, fain
To do a sister's office and laugh smooth
Thy corrugated brow—that scowls forsooth!

CXLVII.

Wherefore? Who does not know how these La Roques,
Voltaires, can say and unsay, praise and blame,
Prove black white, white black, play at paradox
And, when they seem to lose it, win the game?

Care not thou what this badger, and that fox,
His fellow in rascality, call "fame!"
Fiddlepin's end! Thou hadst it, — quack, quack
quack!
Have quietude from geese at Bergerac!

CXLVIII.

Quietude! For, be very sure of this!
A twelvemonth hence, and men shall know or care
As much for what to-day they clap or hiss
As for the fashion of the wigs they wear,
Then wonder at. There 's fame which, bale or bliss,—
Got by no gracious word of great Voltaire
Or not-so-great La Roque,— is taken back
By neither, any more than Bergerac!

CXLIX.

Too true! or rather, true as ought to be!
No more of Paul the man, Malcrais the maid,
Thenceforth for ever! One or two, I see,
Stuck by their poet: who the longest stayed
Was Jean-Baptiste Rousseau, and even he
Seemingly saddened as perforce he paid
A rhyming tribute "After death, survive—
He hoped he should; and died while yet alive!"

CL.

No, he hoped nothing of the kind, or held
His peace and died in silent good old age.
Him it was, curiosity impelled
To seek if there were extant still some page
Of his great predecessor, rat who belled
The cat once, and would never deign engage
In after-combat with mere mice,—saved from
More sonnetteering,—René Gentilhomme.

CLI.

Paul's story furnished forth that famous play
Of Piron's "Métromanie": there you 'll find
He 's Francaleu, while Demoiselle Malcrais
Is Demoiselle No-end-of-names-behind!
As for Voltaire, he 's Damis. Good and gay
The plot and dialogue, and all 's designed
To spite Voltaire: at "Something" such the laugh
Of simply "Nothing!" (see his epitaph).

CLII.

But truth, truth, that 's the gold! and all the good
I find in fancy is, it serves to set
Gold's inmost glint free, gold which comes up rude
And rayless from the mine. All fume and fret

Of artistry beyond this point pursued
Brings out another sort of burnish: yet
Always the ingot has its very own
Value, a sparkle struck from truth alone.

CLIII.

Now, take this sparkle and the other spirt
Of fitful flame,—twin births of our grey brand
That's sinking fast to ashes! I assert,
As sparkles want but fuel to expand
Into a conflagration no mere squirt
Will quench too quickly, so might Croisic strand,
Had Fortune pleased posterity to chowse,
Boast of her brace of beacons luminous.

CLIV.

Did earlier Agamemnons lack their bard?
But later bards lacked Agamemnon too!
How often frustrate they of fame's award
Just because Fortune, as she listed, blew
Some slight bark's sails to bellying, mauled and marred
And forced to put about the First-rate! True,
Such tacks but for a time: still—small-craft ride
At anchor, rot while Beddoes breasts the tide!

CLV.

Dear, shall I tell you? There 's a simple test
Would serve, when people take on them to weigh
The worth of poets, "Who was better, best,
This, that, the other bard?" (bards none gainsay
As good, observe! no matter for the rest)
"What quality preponderating may
Turn the scale as it trembles?" End the strife
By asking "Which one led a happy life?"

CLVI.

If one did, over his antagonist
That yelled or shrieked or sobbed or wept or wailed
Or simply had the dumps,—dispute who list,—
I count him victor. Where his fellow failed,
Mastered by his own means of might,—acquist
Of necessary sorrows,—he prevailed,
A strong since joyful man who stood distinct
Above slave-sorrows to his chariot linked.

CLVII.

Was not his lot to feel more? What meant "feel"
Unless to suffer! Not, to see more? Sight—
What helped it but to watch the drunken reel
Of vice and folly round him, left and right,

One dance of rogues and idiots! Not, to deal
More with things lovely? What provoked the spite
Of filth incarnate, like the poet's need
Of other nutriment than strife and greed!

CLVIII.

Who knows most, doubts most; entertaining hope,
Means recognizing fear; the keener sense
Of all comprised within our actual scope
Recoils from aught beyond earth's dim and dense.
Who, grown familiar with the sky, will grope
Henceforward among groundlings? That 's offence
Just as indubitably: stars abound
O'erhead, but then—what flowers make glad the ground!

CLIX.

So, force is sorrow, and each sorrow, force:
What then? since Swiftness gives the charioteer
The palm, his hope be in the vivid horse
Whose neck God clothed with thunder, not the steer
Sluggish and safe! Yoke Hatred, Crime, Remorse,
Despair: but ever mid the whirling fear,
Let, through the tumult, break the poet's face
Radiant, assured his wild slaves win the race!

CLX.

Therefore I say . . . no, shall not say, but think,
And save my breath for better purpose. White
From grey our log has burned to: just one blink
That quivers, loth to leave it, as a sprite
The outworn body. Ere your eyelids' wink
Punish who sealed so deep into the night
Your mouth up, for two poets dead so long,—
Here pleads a live pretender: right your wrong!

I.

What a pretty tale you told me
Once upon a time
—Said you found it somewhere (scold me!)
Was it prose or was it rhyme,
Greek or Latin? Greek, you said,
While your shoulder propped my head.

II.

Anyhow there 's no forgetting
This much if no more,
That a poet (pray, no petting !)
Yes, a bard, sir, famed of yore,
Went where suchlike used to go,
Singing for a prize, you know.

III.

Well, he had to sing, nor merely
Sing but play the lyre ;
Playing was important clearly
Quite as singing : I desire,
Sir, you keep the fact in mind
For a purpose that 's behind.

IV.

There stood he, while deep attention
Held the judges round,
—Judges able, I should mention,
To detect the slightest sound
Sung or played amiss : such ears
Had old judges, it appears !

V

None the less he sang out boldly,
Played in time and tune,
Till the judges, weighing coldly
Each note's worth, seemed, late or soon,
Sure to smile "In vain one tries
Picking faults out: take the prize!"

VI

When, a mischief! Were they seven
Strings the lyre possessed?
Oh, and afterwards eleven,
Thank you! Well, sir,—who had guessed
Such ill luck in store?—it happed
One of those same seven strings snapped.

VII.

All was lost, then! No! a cricket
(What "cicada"? Pooh!)
—Some mad thing that left its thicket
For mere love of music—flew
With its little heart on fire,
Lighted on the crippled lyre.

VIII.

So that when (ah joy!) our singer
For his truant string
Feels with disconcerted finger,
What does cricket else but fling
Fiery heart forth, sound the note
Wanted by the throbbing throat?

IX.

Ay and, ever to the ending,
Cricket chirps at need,
Executes the hand's intending,
Promptly, perfectly,—indeed
Saves the singer from defeat
With her chirrup low and sweet.

X.

Till, at ending, all the judges
Cry with one assent
"Take the prize—a prize who grudges
Such a voice and instrument?
Why, we took your lyre for harp,
So it shrilled us forth F sharp!"

XI.

Did the conqueror spurn the creature,
Once its service done?
That 's no such uncommon feature
In the case when Music's son
Finds his Lotte's power too spent
For aiding soul-development.

XII.

No! This other, on returning
Homeward, prize in hand,
Satisfied his bosom's yearning:
(Sir, I hope you understand!)
—Said "Some record there must be
Of this cricket's help to me!"

XIII.

So, he made himself a statue:
Marble stood, life-size;
On the lyre, he pointed at you
Perched his partner in the prize;
Never more apart you found
Her, he throned, from him, she crowned.

XIV.

That 's the tale: its application?
Somebody I know
Hopes one day for reputation
Through his poetry that 's—Oh,
All so learned and so wise
And deserving of a prize!

XV.

If he gains one, will some ticket,
When his statue 's built,
Tell the gazer "'T was a cricket
Helped my crippled lyre, whose tilt
Sweet and low, when strength usurped
Softness' place i' the scale, she chirped?

XVI.

"For as victory was nighest,
While I sang and played,—
With my lyre at lowest, highest,
Right alike,—one string that made
'Love' sound soft was snapt in twain,
Never to be heard again,—

XVII.

"Had not a kind cricket fluttered,
Perched upon the place
Vacant left, and duly uttered
'Love, Love, Love,' whene'er the bass
Asked the treble to atone
For its somewhat sombre drone."

XVIII.

But you don't know music! Wherefore
Keep on casting pearls
To a—poet? All I care for
Is—to tell him that a girl's
"Love" comes aptly in when gruff
Grows his singing. (There, enough!)

END OF THE FOURTEENTH VOLUME.

THE POETICAL WORKS

of

ROBERT BROWNING

VOL. XV.

DRAMATIC IDYLS

JOCOSERIA

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DRAMATIC IDYLS.

FIRST SERIES.

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

FIRST SERIES.

1879.

MARTIN RELPH.

My grandfather says he remembers he saw, when a youngster long ago,
On a bright May day, a strange old man, with a beard as white as snow,
Stand on the hill outside our town like a monument of woe,
And, striking his bare bald head the while, sob out the reason—so!

If I last as long as Methuselah I shall never forgive myself:
But—God forgive me, that I pray, unhappy Martin Relph,

As coward, coward I call him—him, yes, him! Away from me!
Get you behind the man I am now, you man that I used to be!

What can have sewed my mouth up, set me a-stare, all eyes, no tongue?
People have urged "You visit a scare too hard on a lad so young!
You were taken aback, poor boy," they urge, "no time to regain your wits:
Besides it had maybe cost you life." Ay, there is the cap which fits!

So, cap me, the coward,—thus! No fear! A cuff on the brow does good:
The feel of it hinders a worm inside which bores at the brain for food.
See now, there certainly seems excuse: for a moment, I trust, dear friends,
The fault was but folly, no fault of mine, or if mine, I have made amends!

For, every day that is first of May, on the hill-top, here stand I,

Martin Relph, and I strike my brow, and publish the reason why,
When there gathers a crowd to mock the fool. No fool, friends, since the bite
Of a worm inside is worse to bear: pray God I have baulked him quite!

I 'll tell you. Certainly much excuse! It came of the way they cooped
Us peasantry up in a ring just here, close huddling because tight-hooped
By the red-coats round us villagers all: they meant we should see the sight
And take the example,—see, not speak, for speech was the Captain's right.

"You clowns on the slope, beware!" cried he: "This woman about to die
Gives by her fate fair warning to such acquaintance as play the spy.
Henceforth who meddle with matters of state above them perhaps will learn
That peasants should stick to their plough-tail, leave to the King the King's concern.

"Here's a quarrel that sets the land on fire, between
King George and his foes:
What call has a man of your kind—much less, a woman
—to interpose?
Yet you needs must be meddling, folk like you, not
foes—so much the worse!
The many and loyal should keep themselves unmixed
with the few perverse.

"Is the counsel hard to follow? I gave it you plainly a
month ago,
And where was the good? The rebels have learned just
all that they need to know.
Not a month since in we quietly marched: a week, and
they had the news,
From a list complete of our rank and file to a note of
our caps and shoes.

"All about all we did and all we were doing and like to
do!
Only, I catch a letter by luck, and capture who wrote it,
too.
Some of you men look black enough, but the milk-white
face demure
Betokens the finger foul with ink: 't is a woman who
writes, be sure!

"Is it 'Dearie, how much I miss your mouth!'—good
natural stuff, she pens?
Some sprinkle of that, for a blind, of course: with talk
about cocks and hens,
How 'robin has built on the apple-tree, and our creeper
which came to grief
Through the frost, we feared, is twining afresh round
casement in famous leaf.'

"But all for a blind! She soon glides frank into 'Horrid
the place is grown
With Officers here and Privates there, no nook we may
call our own:
And Farmer Giles has a tribe to house, and lodging will
be to seek
For the second Company sure to come ('t is whispered)
on Monday week.'

"And so to the end of the chapter! There! The
murder, you see, was out:
Easy to guess how the change of mind in the rebels was
brought about!
Safe in the trap would they now lie snug, had treachery
made no sign:
But treachery meets a just reward, no matter if fools
malign!

"That traitors had played us false, was proved— sent
news which fell so pat:
And the murder was out—this letter of love, the sender
of this sent that!
'T is an ugly job, though, all the same—a hateful, to have
to deal
With a case of the kind, when a woman 's in fault: we
soldiers need nerves of steel!

"So, I gave her a chance, despatched post-haste a mes-
sage to Vincent Parkes
Whom she wrote to; easy to find he was, since one of
the King's own clerks,
Ay, kept by the King's own gold in the town close by
where the rebels camp:
A sort of a lawyer, just the man to betray our sort—the
scamp!

"'If her writing is simple and honest and only the lover-
like stuff it looks,
And if you yourself are a loyalist, nor down in the rebels'
books,
Come quick,' said I, 'and in person prove you are each
of you clear of crime,
Or martial law must take its course: this day next week 's
the time!'

"Next week is now: does he come? Not he! Clean
gone, our clerk, in a trice!
He has left his sweetheart here in the lurch: no need of
a warning twice!
His own neck free, but his partner's fast in the noose
still, here she stands
To pay for her fault. 'T is an ugly job: but soldiers
obey commands.

"And hearken wherefore I make a speech! Should any
acquaintance share
The folly that led to the fault that is now to be punished,
let fools beware!
Look black, if you please, but keep hands white: and,
above all else, keep wives—
Or sweethearts or what they may be—from ink! Not a
word now, on your lives!"

Black? but the Pit's own pitch was white to the Cap-
tain's face—the brute
With the bloated cheeks and the bulgy nose and the
bloodshot eyes to suit!
He was muddled with wine, they say: more like, he was
out of his wits with fear;
He had but a handful of men, that 's true,—a riot might
cost him dear.

And all that time stood Rosamund Page, with pinioned arms and face
Bandaged about, on the turf marked out for the party's firing-place.
I hope she was wholly with God : I hope 't was His angel stretched a hand
To steady her so, like the shape of stone you see in our church-aisle stand.

I hope there was no vain fancy pierced the bandage to vex her eyes,
No face within which she missed without, no questions and no replies—
"Why did you leave me to die?"—"Because . . ." Oh, fiends, too soon you grin
At merely a moment of hell, like that—such heaven as hell ended in!

Let mine end too! He gave the word, up went the guns in a line.
Those heaped on the hill were blind as dumb,—for, of all eyes, only mine
Looked over the heads of the foremost rank. Some fell on their knees in prayer,
Some sank to the earth, but all shut eyes, with a sole exception there.

That was myself, who had stolen up last, had sidled
behind the group:
I am highest of all on the hill-top, there stand fixed
while the others stoop!
From head to foot in a serpent's twine am I tightened:
I touch ground?
No more than a gibbet's rigid corpse which the fetters
rust around!

Can I speak, can I breathe, can I burst—aught else but
see, see, only see?
And see I do—for there comes in sight—a man, it sure
must be!—
Who staggeringly, stumblingly rises, falls, rises, at random
flings his weight
On and on, anyhow onward—a man that 's mad he
arrives too late!

Else why does he wave a something white high-flourished
above his head?
Why does not he call, cry,—curse the fool!—why throw
up his arms instead?
O take this fist in your own face, fool! Why does not
yourself shout "Stay!
Here 's a man comes rushing, might and main, with
something he 's mad to say"?

And a minute, only a moment, to have hell-fire boil up
in your brain,
And ere you can judge things right, choose heaven,—
time 's over, repentance vain !
They level : a volley, a smoke and the clearing of smoke :
I see no more
Of the man smoke hid, nor his frantic arms, nor the
something white he bore.

But stretched on the field, some half-mile off, is an
object. Surely dumb,
Deaf, blind were we struck, that nobody heard, not one
of us saw him come !
Has he fainted through fright ? One may well believe !
What is it he holds so fast ?
Turn him over, examine the face ! Heyday ! What,
Vincent Parkes at last ?

Dead ! dead as she, by the self-same shot : one bullet
has ended both,
Her in the body and him in the soul. They laugh at
our plighted troth.
"Till death us do part?" Till death us do join past
parting—that sounds like
Betrothal indeed ! O Vincent Parkes, what need has my
fist to strike ?

I helped you: thus were you dead and wed: one bound,
and your soul reached hers!
There is clenched in your hand the thing, signed, sealed,
the paper which plain avers
She is innocent, innocent, plain as print, with the King's
Arms broad engraved:
No one can hear, but if anyone high on the hill can see,
she 's saved!

And torn his garb and bloody his lips with heart-break—
plain it grew
How the week's delay had been brought about: each
guess at the end proved true.
It was hard to get at the folk in power: such waste of
time! and then
Such pleading and praying, with, all the while, his lamb
in the lions' den!

And at length when he wrung their pardon out, no end
to the stupid forms—
The licence and leave: I make no doubt—what wonder
if passion warms
The pulse in a man if you play with his heart?—he was
something hasty in speech;
Anyhow, none would quicken the work: he had to
beseech, beseech!

And the thing once signed, sealed, safe in his grasp,—
what followed but fresh delays?
For the floods were out, he was forced to take such a
roundabout of ways!
And 't was "Halt there!" at every turn of the road, since
he had to cross the thick
Of the red-coats: what did they care for him and his
"Quick, for God's sake, quick!"

Horse? but he had one: had it how long? till the first
knave smirked "You brag
Yourself a friend of the King's? then lend to a King's
friend here your nag!"
Money to buy another? Why, piece by piece they
plundered him still,
With their "Wait you must,—no help: if aught can help
you, a guinea will!"

And a borough there was—I forget the name—whose
Mayor must have the bench
Of Justices ranged to clear a doubt: for "Vincent,"
thinks he, sounds French!
It well may have driven him daft, God knows! all man
can certainly know
Is—rushing and falling and rising, at last he arrived in a
horror—so!

When a word, cry, gasp, would have rescued both! Ay
bite me! The worm begins
At his work once more. Had cowardice proved—that
only—my sin of sins!
Friends, look you here! Suppose . . . suppose . . .
But mad I am, needs must be!
Judas the Damned would never have dared such a sin
as I dream! For, see!

Suppose I had sneakingly loved her myself, my wretched
self, and dreamed
In the heart of me "She were better dead than happy
and his!"—while gleamed
A light from hell as I spied the pair in a perfectest
embrace,
He the saviour and she the saved,—bliss born of the very
murder-place!

No! Say I was scared, friends! Call me fool and
coward, but nothing worse!
Jeer at the fool and gibe at the coward! 'T was ever
the coward's curse
That fear breeds fancies in such: such take their shadow
for substance still,
—A fiend at their back. I liked poor Parkes,—loved
Vincent, if you will!

And her—why, I said "Good morrow" to her, "Good even," and nothing more:
The neighbourly way! She was just to me as fifty had been before.
So, coward it is and coward shall be! There 's a friend, now! Thanks! A drink
Of water I wanted: and now I can walk, get home by myself, I think.

PHEIDIPPIDES.

Χαίρετε, νικῶμεν.

First I salute this soil of the blessed, river and rock!
Gods of my birthplace, dæmons and heroes, honour to all!
Then I name thee, claim thee for our patron, co-equal in praise
—Ay, with Zeus the Defender, with Her of the ægis and spear!
Also, ye of the bow and the buskin, praised be your peer,
Now, henceforth and forever,—O latest to whom I upraise
Hand and heart and voice! For Athens, leave pasture and flock!
Present to help, potent to save, Pan—patron I call!

Archons of Athens, topped by the tettix, see, I return!
See. 't is myself here standing alive, no spectre that speaks!

Crowned with the myrtle, did you command me, Athens and you,
"Run, Pheidippides, run and race, reach Sparta for aid!
Persia has come, we are here, where is She?" Your command I obeyed,
Ran and raced: like stubble, some field which a fire runs through,
Was the space between city and city: two days, two nights did I burn
Over the hills, under the dales, down pits and up peaks.

Into their midst I broke: breath served but for "Persia has come!
Persia bids Athens proffer slaves'-tribute, water and earth;
Razed to the ground is Eretria—but Athens, shall Athens sink,
Drop into dust and die—the flower of Hellas utterly die,
Die, with the wide world spitting at Sparta, the stupid, the stander-by?
Answer me quick, what help, what hand do you stretch o'er destruction's brink?
How,—when? No care for my limbs!—there 's lightning in all and some—
Fresh and fit your message to bear, once lips give it birth!"

O my Athens—Sparta love thee? Did Sparta respond?
Every face of her leered in a furrow of envy, mistrust,
Malice,—each eye of her gave me its glitter of gratified hate!
Gravely they turned to take counsel, to cast for excuses. I stood
Quivering,—the limbs of me fretting as fire frets, an inch from dry wood:
"Persia has come, Athens asks aid, and still they debate?
Thunder, thou Zeus! Athene, are Spartans a quarry beyond
Swing of thy spear? Phoibos and Artemis, clang them 'Ye must'!"

No bolt launched from Olumpos! Lo, their answer at last!
"Has Persia come,—does Athens ask aid,—may Sparta befriend?
Nowise precipitate judgment—too weighty the issue at stake!
Count we no time lost time which lags through respect to the Gods!
Ponder that precept of old, 'No warfare, whatever the odds
In your favour, so long as the moon, half-orbed, is unable to take

Full-circle her state in the sky!' Already she rounds to
it fast:
Athens must wait, patient as we—who judgment suspend."

Athens,—except for that sparkle,—thy name, I had
mouldered to ash!
That sent a blaze through my blood; off, off and away
was I back,
—Not one word to waste, one look to lose on the false
and the vile!
Yet "O Gods of my land!" I cried, as each hillock and
plain,
Wood and stream, I knew, I named, rushing past them
again,
"Have ye kept faith, proved mindful of honours we paid
you erewhile?
Vain was the filleted victim, the fulsome libation! Too
rash
Love in its choice, paid you so largely service so slack!

"Oak and olive and bay,—I bid you cease to enwreathe
Brows made bold by your leaf! Fade at the Persian's
foot,
You that, our patrons were pledged, should never adorn
a slave!

Rather I hail thee, Parnes,—trust to thy wild waste tract !
Treeless, herbless, lifeless mountain ! What matter if slacked
My speed may hardly be, for homage to crag and to cave
No deity deigns to drape with verdure? at least I can breathe,
Fear in thee no fraud from the blind, no lie from the mute ! "

Such my cry as, rapid, I ran over Parnes' ridge ;
Gully and gap I clambered and cleared till, sudden, a bar
Jutted, a stoppage of stone against me, blocking the way.
Right ! for I minded the hollow to traverse, the fissure across :
" Where I could enter, there I depart by ! Night in the fosse ?
Athens to aid ? Though the dive were through Erebos, thus I obey—
Out of the day dive, into the day as bravely arise ! No bridge
Better ! "—when—ha ! what was it I came on, of wonders that are ?

There, in the cool of a cleft, sat he—majestical Pan !
Ivy drooped wanton, kissed his head, moss cushioned his hoof :

All the great God was good in the eyes grave-kindly—
the curl
Carved on the bearded cheek, amused at a mortal's awe,
As, under the human trunk, the goat-thighs grand I saw.
"Halt, Pheidippides!"—halt I did, my brain of a whirl:
"Hither to me! Why pale in my presence?" he gracious
began:
"How is it,—Athens, only in Hellas, holds me aloof?

"Athens, she only, rears me no fane, makes me no feast!
Wherefore? Than I what godship to Athens more help-
ful of old?
Ay, and still, and forever her friend! Test Pan, trust me!
Go, bid Athens take heart, laugh Persia to scorn, have
faith
In the temples and tombs! Go, say to Athens, 'The
Goat-God saith:
When Persia—so much as strews not the soil—is cast in
the sea,
Then praise Pan who fought in the ranks with your most
and least,
Goat-thigh to greaved-thigh, made one cause with the
free and the bold!'

"Say Pan saith: 'Let this, foreshowing the place, be the
pledge!'"

(Gay, the liberal hand held out this herbage I bear
—Fennel—I grasped it a-tremble with dew—whatever it bode)
"While, as for thee . . . " But enough! He was gone. If I ran hitherto—
Be sure that, the rest of my journey, I ran no longer, but flew.
Parnes to Athens—earth no more, the air was my road:
Here am I back. Praise Pan, we stand no more on the razor's edge!
Pan for Athens, Pan for me! I too have a guerdon rare!

Then spoke Miltiades. "And thee, best runner of Greece,
Whose limbs did duty indeed,—what gift is promised thyself?
Tell it us straightway,—Athens the mother demands of her son!"
Rosily blushed the youth: he paused: but, lifting at length
His eyes from the ground, it seemed as he gathered the rest of his strength
Into the utterance—"Pan spoke thus: 'For what thou hast done

Count on a worthy reward! Henceforth be allowed thee release
From the racer's toil, no vulgar reward in praise or in pelf!'

"I am bold to believe, Pan means reward the most to my mind!
Fight I shall, with our foremost, wherever this fennel may grow,—
Pound—Pan helping us—Persia to dust, and, under the deep,
Whelm her away for ever; and then,—no Athens to save,—
Marry a certain maid, I know keeps faith to the brave,—
Hie to my house and home: and, when my children shall creep
Close to my knees,—recount how the God was awful yet kind,
Promised their sire reward to the full—rewarding him —so!"

Unforeseeing one! Yes, he fought on the Marathon day:
So, when Persia was dust, all cried "To Akropolis!
Run, Pheidippides, one race more! the meed is thy due!

'Athens is saved, thank Pan,' go shout!" He flung down his shield,
Ran like fire once more: and the space 'twixt the Fennel-field
And Athens was stubble again, a field which a fire runs through,
Till in he broke: "Rejoice, we conquer!" Like wine through clay,
Joy in his blood bursting his heart, he died—the bliss!

So, to this day, when friend meets friend, the word of salute
Is still "Rejoice!"—his word which brought rejoicing indeed.
So is Pheidippides happy for ever,—the noble strong man
Who could race like a God, bear the face of a God, whom a God loved so well;
He saw the land saved he had helped to save, and was suffered to tell
Such tidings, yet never decline, but, gloriously as he began,
So to end gloriously—once to shout, thereafter be mute:
"Athens is saved!"—Pheidippides dies in the shout for his meed.

HALBERT AND HOB.

HERE is a thing that happened. Like wild beasts whelped, for den,
In a wild part of North England, there lived once two wild men
Inhabiting one homestead, neither a hovel nor hut,
Time out of mind their birthright: father and son, these — but—
Such a son, such a father! Most wildness by degrees
Softens away: yet, last of their line, the wildest and worst were these.

Criminals, then? Why, no: they did not murder and rob;
But, give them a word, they returned a blow—old Halbert as young Hob:
Harsh and fierce of word, rough and savage of deed,
Hated or feared the more—who knows?—the genuine wild-beast breed.

Thus were they found by the few sparse folk of the country-side;
But how fared each with other? E'en beasts couch, hide by hide,
In a growling, grudged agreement: so, father and son aye curled
The closelier up in their den because the last of their kind in the world.

Still, beast irks beast on occasion. One Christmas night of snow,
Came father and son to words—such words! more cruel because the blow
To crown each word was wanting, while taunt matched gibe, and curse
Competed with oath in wager, like pastime in hell,—nay, worse:
For pastime turned to earnest, as up there sprang at last
The son at the throat of the father, seized him and held him fast.

"Out of this house you go!"—(there followed a hideous oath)—
"This oven where now we bake, too hot to hold us both!

If there 's snow outside, there 's coolness: out with you, bide a spell
In the drift and save the sexton the charge of a parish shell!"

Now, the old trunk was tough, was solid as stump of oak
Untouched at the core by a thousand years: much less had its seventy broke
One whipcord nerve in the muscly mass from neck to shoulder-blade
Of the mountainous man, whereon his child's rash hand like a feather weighed.

Nevertheless at once did the mammoth shut his eyes,
Drop chin to breast, drop hands to sides, stand stiffened —arms and thighs
All of a piece—struck mute, much as a sentry stands,
Patient to take the enemy's fire: his captain so commands.

Whereat the son's wrath flew to fury at such sheer scorn
Of his puny strength by the giant eld thus acting the babe new-born:

And "Neither will this turn serve!" yelled he. "Out with you! Trundle, log!
If you cannot tramp and trudge like a man, try all-fours like a dog!"

Still the old man stood mute. So, logwise,—down to floor
Pulled from his fireside place, dragged on from hearth to door,—
Was he pushed, a very log, staircase along, until
A certain turn in the steps was reached, a yard from the house-door-sill.

Then the father opened eyes—each spark of their rage extinct,—
Temples, late black, dead-blanched,—right-hand with left-hand linked,—
He faced his son submissive; when slow the accents came,
They were strangely mild though his son's rash hand on his neck lay all the same.

"Hob, on just such a night of a Christmas long ago,
For such a cause, with such a gesture, did I drag—so—
My father down thus far: but, softening here, I heard
A voice in my heart, and stopped: you wait for an outer word.

"For your own sake, not mine, soften you too! Untrod
Leave this last step we reach, nor brave the finger of God!
I dared not pass its lifting: I did well. I nor blame
Nor praise you. I stopped here: and, Hob, do you the same!"

Straightway the son relaxed his hold of the father's throat.
They mounted, side by side, to the room again: no note
Took either of each, no sign made each to either: last
As first, in absolute silence, their Christmas-night they passed.

At dawn, the father sate on, dead, in the self-same place,
With an outburst blackening still the old bad fighting-face:
But the son crouched all a-tremble like any lamb new-yeaned.

When he went to the burial, someone's staff he borrowed —tottered and leaned.
But his lips were loose, not locked,—kept muttering, mumbling. "There!

At his cursing and swearing!" the youngsters cried: but
the elders thought "In prayer."
A boy threw stones: he picked them up and stored them
in his vest.

So tottered, muttered, mumbled he, till he died, perhaps
found rest.
"Is there a reason in nature for these hard hearts?" O
Lear,
That a reason out of nature must turn them soft, seems
clear!

IVÀN IVÀNOVITCH.

"They tell me, your carpenters," quoth I to my friend the Russ,
"Make a simple hatchet serve as a tool-box serves with us.
Arm but each man with his axe, 't is a hammer and saw and plane
And chisel, and—what know I else? We should imitate in vain
The mastery wherewithal, by a flourish of just the adze,
He cleaves, clamps, dovetails in,—no need of our nails and brads,—
The manageable pine: 't is said he could shave himself
With the axe,—so all adroit, now a giant and now an elf,
Does he work and play at once!"
Quoth my friend the Russ to me,
"Ay, that and more beside on occasion! It scarce may be
You never heard tell a tale told children, time out of mind,

By father and mother and nurse, for a moral that 's behind,
Which children quickly seize. If the incident happened at all,
We place it in Peter's time when hearts were great not small,
Germanized, Frenchified. I wager 't is old to you
As the story of Adam and Eve, and possibly quite as true."

In the deep of our land, 't is said, a village from out the woods
Emerged on the great main-road 'twixt two great solitudes.
Through forestry right and left, black verst and verst of pine,
From village to village runs the road's long wide bare line.
Clearance and clearance break the else-unconquered growth
Of pine and all that breeds and broods there, leaving loth
Man's inch of masterdom,—spot of life, spirt of fire,—
To star the dark and dread, lest right and rule expire

Throughout the monstrous wild, a-hungered to resume
Its ancient sway, suck back the world into its womb :
Defrauded by man's craft which clove from North to South
This highway broad and straight e'en from the Neva's mouth
To Moscow's gates of gold. So, spot of life and spirt
Of fire aforesaid, burn, each village death-begirt
By wall and wall of pine—unprobed undreamed abyss.

Early one winter morn, in such a village as this,
Snow-whitened everywhere except the middle road
Ice-roughed by track of sledge, there worked by his abode
Ivàn Ivànovitch, the carpenter, employed
On a huge shipmast trunk ; his axe now trimmed and toyed
With branch and twig, and now some chop athwart the bole
Changed bole to billets, bared at once the sap and soul.
About him, watched the work his neighbours sheepskin-clad ;
Each bearded mouth puffed steam, each grey eye twinkled glad
To see the sturdy arm which, never stopping play,
Proved strong man's blood still boils, freeze winter as he may.

Sudden, a burst of bells. Out of the road, on edge
Of the hamlet—horse's hoofs galloping. "How, a sledge?
What 's here?" cried all as—in, up to the open space,
Workyard and market-ground, folk's common meeting-place,—
Stumbled on, till he fell, in one last bound for life,
A horse: and, at his heels, a sledge held—"Dmìtri's wife!
Back without Dmìtri too! and children—where are they?
Only a frozen corpse!"

They drew it forth: then—"Nay,
Not dead, though like to die! Gone hence a month ago:
Home again, this rough jaunt—alone through night and snow—
What can the cause be? Hark—Droug, old horse, how he groans:
His day 's done! Chafe away, keep chafing, for she moans:
She 's coming to! Give here: see, motherkin, your friends!
Cheer up, all safe at home! Warm inside makes amends
For outside cold,—sup quick! Don't look as we were bears!
What is it startles you? What strange adventure stares

Up at us in your face? You know friends—which is
which ?
I 'm Vàssili, he 's Sergeì, Ivàn Ivànovitch . . ."

At the word, the woman's eyes, slow-wandering till they
neared
The blue eyes o'er the bush of honey-coloured beard,
Took in full light and sense and—torn to rags, some
dream
Which hid the naked truth—O loud and long the scream
She gave, as if all power of voice within her throat
Poured itself wild away to waste in one dread note !
Then followed gasps and sobs, and then the steady flow
Of kindly tears : the brain was saved, a man might know.
Down fell her face upon the good friend's propping
knee ;
His broad hands smoothed her head, as fain to brush it
free
From fancies, swarms that stung like bees unhived. He
soothed—
"Loukèria, Loùscha ! "—still he, fondling, smoothed and
smoothed.
At last her lips formed speech.

"Ivàn, dear—you indeed !
You, just the same dear you ! While I . . . O intercede,

Sweet Mother, with thy Son Almighty—let his might
Bring yesterday once more, undo all done last night!
But this time yesterday, Ivàn, I sat like you,
A child on either knee, and, dearer than the two,
A babe inside my arms, close to my heart—that 's lost
In morsels o'er the snow! Father, Son, Holy Ghost,
Cannot you bring again my blessed yesterday?"

When no more tears would flow, she told her tale: this way.

"Maybe, a month ago,—was it not?—news came here,
They wanted, deeper down, good workmen fit to rear
A church and roof it in. 'We 'll go,' my husband said:
'None understands like me to melt and mould their lead.'
So, friends here helped us off—Ivàn, dear, you the first!
How gay we jingled forth, all five—(my heart will burst)—
While Dmìtri shook the reins, urged Droug upon his track!

"Well, soon the month ran out, we just were coming back,
When yesterday—behold, the village was on fire!
Fire ran from house to house. What help, as, nigh and nigher,

The flames came furious? 'Haste,' cried Dmìtri, 'men must do
The little good man may: to sledge and in with you,
You and our three! We check the fire by laying flat
Each building in its path,—I needs must stay for that,—
But you . . . no time for talk! Wrap round you every rug,
Cover the couple close,—you 'll have the babe to hug.
No care to guide old Droug, he knows his way, by guess,
Once start him on the road: but chirrup, none the less!
The snow lies glib as glass and hard as steel, and soon
You 'll have rise, fine and full, a marvel of a moon.
Hold straight up, all the same, this lighted twist of pitch!
Once home and with our friend Ivàn Ivànovitch,
All 's safe: I have my pay in pouch, all 's right with me,
So I but find as safe you and our precious three!
Off, Droug!'—because the flames had reached us, and the men
Shouted 'But lend a hand, Dmìtri—as good as ten!'

"So, in we bundled—I, and those God gave me once;
Old Droug, that 's stiff at first, seemed youthful for the nonce:
He understood the case, galloping straight ahead.
Out came the moon: my twist soon dwindled, feebly red

In that unnatural day—yes, daylight, bred between
Moon-light and snow-light, lamped those grotto-depths which screen
Such devils from God's eye. Ah, pines, how straight you grow
Nor bend one pitying branch, true breed of brutal snow!
Some undergrowth had served to keep the devils blind
While we escaped outside their border!

"Was that—wind?
Anyhow, Droug starts, stops, back go his ears, he snuffs,
Snorts,—never such a snort! then plunges, knows the sough 's
Only the wind: yet, no—our breath goes up too straight!
Still the low sound,—less low, loud, louder, at a rate
There 's no mistaking more! Shall I lean out—look—learn
The truth whatever it be? Pad, pad! At last, I turn—

"'T is the regular pad of the wolves in pursuit of the life in the sledge!
An army they are: close-packed they press like the thrust of a wedge:
They increase as they hunt: for I see, through the pine-trunks ranged each side,

Slip forth new fiend and fiend, make wider and still more wide
The four-footed steady advance. The foremost—none may pass :
They are elders and lead the line, eye and eye—green-glowing brass !
But a long way distant still. Droug, save us ! He does his best :
Yet they gain on us, gain, till they reach,—one reaches . . . How utter the rest ?
O that Satan-faced first of the band ! How he lolls out the length of his tongue,
How he laughs and lets gleam his white teeth ! He is on me, his paws pry among
The wraps and the rugs ! O my pair, my twin-pigeons, lie still and seem dead !
Stepàn, he shall never have you for a meal,—here 's your mother instead !
No, he will not be counselled—must cry, poor Stiòpka, so foolish ! though first
Of my boy-brood, he was not the best : nay, neighbours have called him the worst :
He was puny, an undersized slip,—a darling to me, all the same !
But little there was to be praised in the boy, and a plenty to blame.

I loved him with heart and soul, yes—but, deal him a blow for a fault,
He would sulk for whole days. 'Foolish boy! lie still or the villain will vault,
Will snatch you from over my head!' No use! he cries, screams,—who can hold
Fast a boy in a frenzy of fear! It follows—as I foretold!
The Satan-face snatched and snapped: I tugged, I tore —and then
His brother too needs must shriek! If one must go, 't is men
The Tsar needs, so we hear, not a'ling boys! Perhaps
My hands relaxed their grasp, got tangled in the wraps:
God, he was gone! I looked: there tumbled the cursed crew,
Each fighting for a share: too busy to pursue!
That 's so far gain at least: Droug, gallop another verst
Or two, or three—God sends we beat them, arrive the first!
A mother who boasts two boys was ever accounted rich:
Some have not a boy: some have, but lose him,—God knows which
Is worse: how pitiful to see your weakling pine
And pale and pass away! Strong brats, this pair of mine!

"O misery! for while I settle to what near seems
Content, I am 'ware again of the tramp, and again there gleams—
Point and point—the line, eyes, levelled green brassy fire!
So soon is resumed your chase? Will nothing appease, nought tire
The furies? And yet I think—I am certain the race is slack,
And the numbers are nothing like. Not a quarter of the pack!
Feasters and those full-fed are staying behind . . . Ah why?
We 'll sorrow for that too soon! Now,—gallop, reach home, and die,
Nor ever again leave house, to trust our life in the trap
For life—we call a sledge! Teriòscha, in my lap!
Yes, I 'll lie down upon you, tight-tie you with the strings
Here—of my heart! No fear, this time, your mother flings . .
Flings? I flung? Never! But think!—a woman, after all
Contending with a wolf! Save you I must and shall,
Terentiì!
"How now? What, you still head the race,

Your eyes and tongue and teeth crave fresh food, Satan-face?
There and there! Plain I struck green fire out! Flash again?
All a poor fist can do to damage eyes proves vain!
My fist—why not crunch that? He is wanton for . . . O God,
Why give this wolf his taste? Common wolves scrape and prod
The earth till out they scratch some corpse—mere putrid flesh!
Why must this glutton leave the faded, choose the fresh?
Terentiï—God, feel!—his neck keeps fast thy bag
Of holy things, saints' bones, this Satan-face will drag
Forth, and devour along with him, our Pope declared
The relics were to save from danger!

"Spurned, not spared!
'T was through my arms, crossed arms, he—nuzzling now with snout,
Now ripping, tooth and claw—plucked, pulled Terentiï out,
A prize indeed! I saw—how could I else but see?—
My precious one—I bit to hold back—pulled from me!

Up came the others, fell to dancing—did the imps!—
Skipped as they scampered round. There 's one is grey,
and limps:
Who knows but old bad Màrpha,—she always owed me
spite
And envied me my births,—skulks out of doors at night
And turns into a wolf, and joins the sisterhood,
And laps the youthful life, then slinks from out the wood,
Squats down at door by dawn, spins there demure as erst
—No strength, old crone,—not she!—to crawl forth half
a verst!

"Well, I escaped with one: 'twixt one and none there
lies
The space 'twixt heaven and hell. And see, a rose-light
dyes
The endmost snow: 't is dawn, 't is day, 't is safe at home!
We have outwitted you! Ay, monsters, snarl and foam,
Fight each the other fiend, disputing for a share,—
Forgetful, in your greed, our finest off we bear,
Tough Droug and I,—my babe, my boy that shall be
man,
My man that shall be more, do all a hunter can
To trace and follow and find and catch and crucify
Wolves, wolfkins, all your crew! A thousand deaths
shall die

The whimperingest cub that ever squeezed the teat!
'Take that!' we 'll stab you with,—'the tenderness we
met
When, wretches, you danced round—not this, thank God
—not this!
Hellhounds, we baulk you!'

"But—Ah, God above!—Bliss, bliss—
Not the band, no! And yet—yes, for Droug knows
him! One—
This only of them all has said 'She saves a son!
His fellows disbelieve such luck: but he believes,
He lets them pick the bones, laugh at him in their sleeves:
He 's off and after us, one speck, one spot, one ball
Grows bigger, bound on bound,—one wolf as good as all!
Oh but I know the trick! Have at the snaky tongue!
That 's the right way with wolves! Go, tell your mates
I wrung
The panting morsel out, left you to howl your worst!
Now for it—now! Ah me! I know him—thrice-accurst
Satan-face,—him to the end my foe!

"All fight 's in vain:
This time the green brass points pierce to my very brain.
I fall—fall as I ought—quite on the babe I guard:
I overspread with flesh the whole of him. Too hard

To die this way, torn piecemeal? Move hence? Not I
—one inch!
Gnaw through me, through and through: flat thus I lie
nor flinch!
O God, the feel of the fang furrowing my shoulder!—see!
It grinds—it grates the bone. O Kirill under me,
Could I do more? Beside he knew wolf's way to win:
I clung, closed round like wax: yet in he wedged and in,
Past my neck, past my breasts, my heart, until . . . how
feels
The onion-bulb your knife parts, pushing through its
peels,
Till out you scoop its clove wherein lie stalk and leaf
And bloom and seed unborn?

"That slew me: yes, in brief,
I died then, dead I lay doubtlessly till Droug stopped
Here, I suppose. I come to life, I find me propped
Thus—how or when or why,—I know not. Tell me,
friends,
All was a dream: laugh quick and say the nightmare
ends!
Soon I shall find my house: 't is over there: in proof,
Save for that chimney heaped with snow, you 'd see the
roof
Which holds my three—my two—my one—not one?

"Life 's mixed
With misery, yet we live—must live. The Satan fixed
His face on mine so fast, I took its print as pitch
Takes what it cools beneath. Ivàn Ivànovitch,
'T is you unharden me, you thaw, disperse the thing!
Only keep looking kind, the horror will not cling.
Your face smooths fast away each print of Satan. Tears
—What good they do! Life 's sweet, and all its after-years,
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I owe you! Yours am I!
May God reward you, dear!"

Down she sank. Solemnly
Ivàn rose, raised his axe,—for fitly, as she knelt,
Her head lay: well-apart, each side, her arms hung,—dealt
Lightning-swift thunder-strong one blow—no need of more!
Headless she knelt on still: that pine was sound at core
(Neighbours were used to say)—cast-iron-kernelled—which
Taxed for a second stroke Ivàn Ivànovitch.

The man was scant of words as strokes. "It had to be:
I could no other: God it was bade 'Act for me!'"

Then stooping, peering round—what is it now he lacks?
A proper strip of bark wherewith to wipe his axe.
Which done, he turns, goes in, closes the door behind.
The others mute remain, watching the blood-snake wind
Into a hiding-place among the splinter-heaps.

At length, still mute, all move: one lifts,—from where it steeps
Redder each ruddy rag of pine,—the head: two more
Take up the dripping body: then, mute still as before,
Move in a sort of march, march on till marching ends
Opposite to the church; where halting,—who suspends,
By its long hair, the thing, deposits in its place
The piteous head: once more the body shows no trace
Of harm done: there lies whole the Loùscha, maid and wife
And mother, loved until this latest of her life.
Then all sit on the bank of snow which bounds a space
Kept free before the porch for judgment: just the place!

Presently all the souls, man, woman, child, which make
The village up, are found assembling for the sake
Of what is to be done. The very Jews are there:
A Gipsy troop, though bound with horses for the Fair,

Squats with the rest. Each heart with its conception seethes
And simmers, but no tongue speaks: one may say — none breathes.

Anon from out the church totters the Pope—the priest—
Hardly alive, so old, a hundred years at least.
With him, the Commune's head, a hoary senior too,
Starosta, that 's his style,—like Equity Judge with you,—
Natural Jurisconsult: then, fenced about with furs,
Pomeschìk,—Lord of the Land, who wields—and none demurs—
A power of life and death. They stoop, survey the corpse.

Then, straightened on his staff, the Stàrosta—the thorpe's
Sagaciousest old man—hears what you just have heard,
From Droug's first inrush, all, up to Ivàn's last word
"God bade me act for him: I dared not disobey!"

Silence—the Pomeschìk broke with "A wild wrong way
Of righting wrong—if wrong there were, such wrath to rouse!
Why was not law observed? What article allows
Whoso may please to play the judge, and, judgment dealt,
Play executioner, as promptly as we pelt

To death, without appeal, the vermin whose sole fault
Has been—it dared to leave the darkness of its vault,
Intrude upon our day! Too sudden and too rash!
What was this woman's crime? Suppose the church should crash
Down where I stand, your lord: bound are my serfs to dare
Their utmost that I 'scape: yet, if the crashing scare
My children,—as you are,—if sons fly, one and all,
Leave father to his fate,—poor cowards though I call
The runaways, I pause before I claim their life
Because they prized it more than mine. I would each wife
Died for her husband's sake, each son to save his sire:
'T is glory, I applaud—scarce duty, I require.
Ivàn Ivànovitch has done a deed that 's named
Murder by law and me: who doubts, may speak unblamed!"

All turned to the old Pope. "Ay, children, I am old—
How old, myself have got to know no longer. Rolled
Quite round, my orb of life, from infancy to age,
Seems passing back again to youth. A certain stage
At least I reach, or dream I reach, where I discern
Truer truths, laws behold more lawlike than we learn

When first we set our foot to tread the course I trod
With man to guide my steps: who leads me now is God.
'Your young men shall see visions:' and in my youth I saw
And paid obedience to man's visionary law:
'Your old men shall dream dreams:' and, in my age, a hand
Conducts me through the cloud round law to where I stand
Firm on its base,—know cause, who, before, knew effect.

"The world lies under me: and nowhere I detect
So great a gift as this—God's own—of human life.
'Shall the dead praise thee?' No! 'The whole live world is rife,
God, with thy glory,' rather! Life then, God's best of gifts,
For what shall man exchange? For life—when so he shifts
The weight and turns the scale, lets life for life restore
God's balance, sacrifice the less to gain the more,
Substitute—for low life, another's or his own—
Life large and liker God's who gave it: thus alone
May life extinguish life that life may trulier be!
How low this law descends on earth, is not for me
To trace: complexed becomes the simple, intricate
The plain, when I pursue law's winding. 'T is the straight

Outflow of law I know and name: to law, the fount
Fresh from God's footstool, friends, follow while I remount.

"A mother bears a child: perfection is complete
So far in such a birth. Enabled to repeat
The miracle of life,—herself was born so just
A type of womankind, that God sees fit to trust
Her with the holy task of giving life in turn.
Crowned by this crowning pride,—how say you, should she spurn
Regality—discrowned, unchilded, by her choice
Of barrenness exchanged for fruit which made rejoice
Creation, though life's self were lost in giving birth
To life more fresh and fit to glorify God's earth?
How say you, should the hand God trusted with life's torch
Kindled to light the world—aware of sparks that scorch,
Let fall the same? Forsooth, her flesh a fire-flake stings
The mother drops the child! Among what monstrous things
Shall she be classed? Because of motherhood, each male
Yields to his partner place, sinks proudly in the scale:
His strength owned weakness, wit—folly, and courage—fear,
Beside the female proved male's mistress—only here.

The fox-dam, hunger-pined, will slay the felon sire
Who dares assault her whelp: the beaver, stretched on fire,
Will die without a groan: no pang avails to wrest
Her young from where they hide—her sanctuary breast.
What 's here then? Answer me, thou dead one, as, I trow,
Standing at God's own bar, he bids thee answer now!
Thrice crowned wast thou—each crown of pride, a child—thy charge!
Where are they? Lost? Enough: no need that thou enlarge
On how or why the loss: life left to utter 'lost'
Condemns itself beyond appeal. The soldier's post
Guards from the foe's attack the camp he sentinels:
That he no traitor proved, this and this only tells—
Over the corpse of him trod foe to foe's success.
Yet—one by one thy crowns torn from thee—thou no less
To scare the world, shame God,—livedst! I hold He saw
The unexampled sin, ordained the novel law,
Whereof first instrument was first intelligence
Found loyal here. I hold that, failing human sense,
The very earth had oped, sky fallen, to efface
Humanity's new wrong, motherhood's first disgrace.

Earth oped not, neither fell the sky, for prompt was found
A man and man enough, head-sober and heart-sound,
Ready to hear God's voice, resolute to obey.
Ivàn Ivànovitch, I hold, has done, this day,
No otherwise than did, in ages long ago,
Moses when he made known the purport of that flow
Of fire athwart the law's twain-tables! I proclaim
Ivàn Ivànovitch God's servant!"

At which name
Uprose that creepy whisper from out the crowd, is wont
To swell and surge and sink when fellow-men confront
A punishment that falls on fellow flesh and blood,
Appallingly beheld—shudderingly understood,
No less, to be the right, the just, the merciful.
"God's servant!" hissed the crowd.

When that Amen grew dull
And died away and left acquittal plain adjudged,
"Amen!" last sighed the lord. "There's none shall say I grudged
Escape from punishment in such a novel case.
Deferring to old age and holy life,—be grace
Granted! say I. No less, scruples might shake a sense
Firmer than I boast mine. Law's law, and evidence

Of breach therein lies plain,—blood-red-bright,—all may see!
Yet all absolve the deed: absolved the deed must be!

"And next—as mercy rules the hour—methinks 't were well
You signify forthwith its sentence, and dispel
The doubts and fears, I judge, which busy now the head
Law puts a halter round—a halo—you, instead!
Ivàn Ivànovitch—what think you he expects
Will follow from his feat? Go, tell him—law protects
Murder, for once: no need he longer keep behind
The Sacred Pictures—where skulks Innocence enshrined,
Or I missay! Go, some! You others, haste and hide
The dismal object there: get done, whate'er betide!"

So, while the youngers raised the corpse, the elders trooped
Silently to the house: where halting, someone stooped,
Listened beside the door; all there was silent too.
Then they held counsel; then pushed door and, passing through,
Stood in the murderer's presence.
Ivàn Ivànovitch
Knelt, building on the floor that Kremlin rare and rich

He deftly cut and carved on lazy winter nights.
Some five young faces watched, breathlessly, as, to rights,
Piece upon piece, he reared the fabric nigh complete.
Stèscha, Ivàn's old mother, sat spinning by the heat
Of the oven where his wife Kàtia stood baking bread.
Ivàn's self, as he turned his honey-coloured head,
Was just in act to drop, 'twixt fir-cones, — each a dome, —
The scooped-out yellow gourd presumably the home
Of Kolokol the Big: the bell, therein to hitch,
—An acorn-cup—was ready: Ivàn Ivànovitch
Turned with it in his mouth.

They told him he was free
As air to walk abroad. "How otherwise?" asked he.

TRAY.

Sing me a hero! Quench my thirst
Of soul, ye bards!
Quoth Bard the first:
"Sir Olaf, the good knight, did don
His helm and eke his habergeon . . ."
Sir Olaf and his bard——!

"That sin-scathed brow" (quoth Bard the second)
"That eye wide ope as though Fate beckoned
My hero to some steep, beneath
Which precipice smiled tempting death . .
You too without your host have reckoned!

"A beggar-child" (let 's hear this third!)
"Sat on a quay's edge: like a bird
Sang to herself at careless play,
And fell into the stream. 'Dismay!
Help, you the standers-by!' None stirred.

"Bystanders reason, think of wives
And children ere they risk their lives.
Over the balustrade has bounced
A mere instinctive dog, and pounced
Plumb on the prize. 'How well he dives!

"'Up he comes with the child, see, tight
In mouth, alive too, clutched from quite
A depth of ten feet—twelve, I bet!
Good dog! What, off again? There 's yet
Another child to save? All right!

"'How strange we saw no other fall!
It 's instinct in the animal.
Good dog! But he 's a long while under:
If he got drowned I should not wonder—
Strong current, that against the wall!

"'Here he comes, holds in mouth this time
—What may the thing be? Well, that 's prime!
Now, did you ever? Reason reigns
In man alone, since all Tray's pains
Have fished—the child's doll from the slime!'

"And so, amid the laughter gay,
Trotted my hero off,—old Tray,—

Till somebody, prerogatived
With reason, reasoned: 'Why he dived,
His brain would show us, I should say.

"'John, go and catch—or, if needs be,
Purchase—that animal for me!
By vivisection, at expense
Of half-an-hour and eighteenpence,
How brain secretes dog's soul, we 'll see!

NED BRATTS.

'T was Bedford Special Assize, one daft Midsummer's Day:
A broiling blasting June, — was never its like, men say.
Corn stood sheaf-ripe already, and trees looked yellow as that;
Ponds drained dust-dry the cattle lay foaming around each flat.
Inside town, dogs went mad, and folk kept bibbing beer
While the parsons prayed for rain. 'T was horrible, yes —but queer:
Queer—for the sun laughed gay, yet nobody moved a hand
To work one stroke at his trade: as given to understand
That all was come to a stop, work and such worldly ways,
And the world's old self about to end in a merry blaze.

Midsummer's Day moreover was the first of Bedford Fair,
With Bedford Town's tag-rag and bobtail a-bowsing there.

But the Court House, Quality crammed: through doors ope, windows wide,
High on the Bench you saw sit Lordships side by side.
There frowned Chief Justice Jukes, fumed learned Brother Small,
And fretted their fellow Judge: like threshers, one and all,
Of a reek with laying down the law in a furnace. Why?
Because their lungs breathed flame—the regular crowd forbye—
From gentry pouring in—quite a nosegay, to be sure!
How else could they pass the time, six mortal hours endure
Till night should extinguish day, when matters might haply mend?
Meanwhile no bad resource was—watching begin and end
Some trial for life and death, in a brisk five minutes' space,
And betting which knave would 'scape, which hang, from his sort of face.

So, their Lordships toiled and moiled, and a deal of work was done
(I warrant) to justify the mirth of the crazy sun

As this and 't other lout, struck dumb at the sudden show
Of red robes and white wigs, boggled nor answered "Boh!"
When asked why he, Tom Styles, should not—because Jack Nokes
Had stolen the horse—be hanged: for Judges must have their jokes,
And louts must make allowance—let 's say, for some blue fly
Which punctured a dewy scalp where the frizzles stuck awry—
Else Tom had fleered scot-free, so nearly over and done
Was the main of the job. Full-measure, the gentles enjoyed their fun,
As a twenty-five were tried, rank puritans caught at prayer
In a cow-house and laid by the heels,—have at 'em, devil may care!—
And ten were prescribed the whip, and ten a brand on the cheek,
And five a slit of the nose—just leaving enough to tweak.

Well, things at jolly high-tide, amusement steeped in fire,
While noon smote fierce the roof's red tiles to heart's desire,

The Court a-simmer with smoke, one ferment of oozy flesh,
One spirituous humming musk mount-mounting until its mesh
Entoiled all heads in a fluster, and Serjeant Postlethwayte
—Dashing the wig oblique as he mopped his oily pate—
Cried "Silence, or I grow grease! No loophole lets in air?
Jurymen,—Guilty, Death! Gainsay me if you dare!"
—Things at this pitch, I say, —what hubbub without the doors?
What laughs, shrieks, hoots and yells, what rudest of uproars?

Bounce through the barrier throng a bulk comes rolling vast!
Thumps, kicks,—no manner of use!—spite of them rolls at last
Into the midst a ball which, bursting, brings to view
Publican Black Ned Bratts and Tabby his big wife too:
Both in a muck-sweat, both . . . were never such eyes uplift
At the sight of yawning hell, such nostrils—snouts that sniffed
Sulphur, such mouths a-gape ready to swallow flame!
Horrified, hideous, frank fiend-faces! yet, all the same,

Mixed with a certain . . . eh? how shall I dare style—
mirth
The desperate grin of the guess that, could they break
from earth,
Heaven was above, and hell might rage in impotence
Below the saved, the saved!

"Confound you! (no offence!)
Out of our way,—push, wife! Yonder their Worships
be!"
Ned Bratts has reached the bar, and "Hey, my Lords,"
roars he,
"A Jury of life and death, Judges the prime of the
land,
Constables, javelineers,—all met, if I understand,
To decide so knotty a point as whether 't was Jack or
Joan
Robbed the henroost, pinched the pig, hit the King's
Arms with a stone,
Dropped the baby down the well, left the tithesman in
the lurch,
Or, three whole Sundays running, not once attended
church!
What a pother—do these deserve the parish-stocks or
whip,
More or less brow to brand, much or little nose to snip,—

When, in our Public, plain stand we—that 's we stand here,
I and my Tab, brass-bold, brick-built of beef and beer,
—Do not we, slut? Step forth and show your beauty, jade!
Wife of my bosom—that 's the word now! What a trade
We drove! None said us nay: nobody loved his life
So little as wag a tongue against us,—did they, wife?
Yet they knew us all the while, in their hearts, for what we are
—Worst couple, rogue and quean, unhanged—search near and far!
Eh, Tab? The pedlar, now—o'er his noggin—who warned a mate
To cut and run, nor risk his pack where its loss of weight
Was the least to dread,—aha, how we two laughed a-good
As, stealing round the midden, he came on where I stood
With billet poised and raised,—you, ready with the rope,—
Ah, but that 's past, that 's sin repented of, we hope!
Men knew us for that same, yet safe and sound stood we!
The lily-livered knaves knew too (I 've baulked a d——)
Our keeping the 'Pied Bull' was just a mere pretence:
Too slow the pounds make food, drink, lodging, from out the pence!

There 's not a stoppage to travel has chanced, this ten
long year,
No break into hall or grange, no lifting of nag or
steer,
Not a single roguery, from the clipping of a purse
To the cutting of a throat, but paid us toll. Od's
curse!
When Gipsy Smouch made bold to cheat us of our
due,
—Eh, Tab? the Squire's strong-box we helped the
rascal to—
I think he pulled a face, next Sessions' swinging-time!
He danced the jig that needs no floor,—and, here 's the
prime,
'T was Scroggs that houghed the mare! Ay, those were
busy days!

"Well, there we flourished brave, like scripture-trees
called bays,
Faring high, drinking hard, in money up to head
—Not to say, boots and shoes, when . . . Zounds, I
nearly said—
Lord, to unlearn one's language! How shall we labour,
wife?
Have you, fast hold, the Book? Grasp, grip it, for your
life!

See, sirs, here's life, salvation! Here's—hold but out
my breath—
When did I speak so long without once swearing?
'Sdeath,
No, nor unhelped by ale since man and boy! And yet
All yesterday I had to keep my whistle wet
While reading Tab this Book: book? don't say 'book'—
they're plays,
Songs, ballads and the like: here's no such strawy blaze,
But sky wide ope, sun, moon, and seven stars out full-
flare!
Tab, help and tell! I'm hoarse. A mug! or—no, a
prayer!
Dip for one out of the Book! Who wrote it in the Jail
—He plied his pen unhelped by beer, sirs, I'll be bail!

"I've got my second wind. In trundles she—that's
Tab.
'Why, Gammer, what's come now, that—bobbing like a
crab
On Yule-tide bowl—your head's a-work and both your
eyes
Break loose? Afeard, you fool? As if the dead can
rise!
Say—Bagman Dick was found last May with fuddling-cap
Stuffed in his mouth: to choke's a natural mishap!'

'Gaffer, be—blessed,' cries she, 'and Bagman Dick as well!
I, you, and he are damned: this Public is our hell:
We live in fire: live coals don't feel!—once quenched, they learn—
Cinders do, to what dust they moulder while they burn!'

"'If you don't speak straight out,' says I—belike I swore—
'A knobstick, well you know the taste of, shall, once more,
Teach you to talk, my maid!' She ups with such a face,
Heart sunk inside me. 'Well, pad on, my prate-apace!'

"'I've been about those laces we need for . . . never mind!
If henceforth they tie hands, 't is mine they'll have to bind.
You know who makes them best—the Tinker in our cage,
Pulled-up for gospelling, twelve years ago: no age
To try another trade,—yet, so he scorned to take
Money he did not earn, he taught himself the make
Of laces, tagged and tough—Dick Bagman found them so!
Good customers were we! Well, last week, you must know

His girl,—the blind young chit, who hawks about his wares,—
She takes it in her head to come no more—such airs
These hussies have! Yet, since we need a stoutish lace,—
"I 'll to the jail-bird father, abuse her to his face!"
So, first I filled a jug to give me heart, and then,
Primed to the proper pitch, I posted to their den—
Patmore—they style their prison! I tip the turnkey, catch
My heart up, fix my face, and fearless lift the latch—
Both arms a-kimbo, in bounce with a good round oath
Ready for rapping out: no "Lawks" nor "By my troth!"

"'There sat my man, the father. He looked up: what one feels
When heart that leapt to mouth drops down again to heels!
He raised his hand . . . Hast seen, when drinking out the night,
And in, the day, earth grow another something quite
Under the sun's first stare? I stood a very stone.

"'"Woman!" (a fiery tear he put in every tone),

"How should my child frequent your house where lust
is sport,
Violence—trade? Too true! I trust no vague report.
Her angel's hand, which stops the sight of sin, leaves
clear
The other gate of sense, lets outrage through the ear.
What has she heard!—which, heard shall never be
again.
Better lack food than feast, a Dives in the—wain
Or reign or train—of Charles!" (His language was not
ours:
'T is my belief, God spoke: no tinker has such powers).
"Bread, only bread they bring—my laces: if we broke
Your lump of leavened sin, the loaf's first crumb would
choke!"

"'Down on my marrow-bones! Then all at once rose
he:
His brown hair burst a-spread, his eyes were suns to
see:
Up went his hands: "Through flesh, I reach, I read thy
soul!
So may some stricken tree look blasted, bough and bole,
Champed by the fire-tooth, charred without, and yet,
thrice-bound
With dreriment about, within may life be found,

A prisoned power to branch and blossom as before,
Could but the gardener cleave the cloister, reach the core,
Loosen the vital sap: yet where shall help be found?
Who says 'How save it?'—nor 'Why cumbers it the ground?'
Woman, that tree art thou! All sloughed about with scurf,
Thy stag-horns fright the sky, thy snake-roots sting the turf!
Drunkenness, wantonness, theft, murder gnash and gnarl
Thine outward, case thy soul with coating like the marle
Satan stamps flat upon each head beneath his hoof!
And how deliver such? The strong men keep aloof,
Lover and friend stand far, the mocking ones pass by,
Tophet gapes wide for prey: lost soul, despair and die!
What then? 'Look unto me and be ye saved!' saith God:
'I strike the rock, outstreats the life-stream at my rod!
Be your sins scarlet, wool shall they seem like,—although
As crimson red, yet turn white as the driven snow!'"

"'There, there, there! All I seem to somehow understand
Is—that, if I reached home, 't was through the guiding hand

Of his blind girl which led and led me through the streets
And out of town and up to door again. What greets
First thing my eye, as limbs recover from their swoon?
A book—this Book she gave at parting. "Father's boon—
The Book he wrote: it reads as if he spoke himself:
He cannot preach in bonds, so,—take it down from shelf
When you want counsel,—think you hear his very voice!"

"Wicked dear Husband, first despair and then rejoice!
Dear wicked Husband, waste no tick of moment more,
Be saved like me, bald trunk! There's greenness yet at core,
Sap under slough! Read, read!'

"Let me take breath, my lords!
I'd like to know, are these—hers, mine, or Bunyan's words?
I'm 'wildered—scarce with drink,—nowise with drink alone!
You'll say, with heat: but heat's no stuff to split a stone

Like this black boulder – this flint heart of mine : the
Book—
That dealt the crashing blow ! Sirs, here 's the fist that
shook
His beard till Wrestler Jem howled like a just-lugged
bear !
You had brained me with a feather : at once I grew
aware
Christian was meant for me. A burden at your back,
Good Master Christian ? Nay,—yours was that Joseph's
sack,
—Or whose it was,—which held the cup, — compared
with mine !
Robbery loads my loins, perjury cracks my chine,
Adultery . . . nay, Tab, you pitched me as I flung !
One word, I 'll up with fist . . . No, sweet spouse, hold
your tongue !

" I 'm hasting to the end. The Book, sirs—take and
read !
You have my history in a nutshell,—ay, indeed !
It must off, my burden ! See,—slack straps and into pit,
Roll, reach the bottom, rest, rot there—a plague on it !
For a mountain 's sure to fall and bury Bedford Town,
' Destruction '—that 's the name, and fire shall burn it
down !

O 'scape the wrath in time! Time 's now, if not too
late.
How can I pilgrimage up to the wicket-gate?
Next comes Despond the slough: not that I fear to
pull
Through mud, and dry my clothes at brave House Beau-
tiful—
But it 's late in the day, I reckon: had I left years
ago
Town, wife, and children dear . . . Well, Christian did,
you know!—
Soon I had met in the valley and tried my cudgel's
strength
On the enemy horned and winged, a-straddle across its
length!
Have at his horns, thwick—thwack: they snap, see!
Hoof and hoof—
Bang, break the fetlock-bones! For love's sake, keep
aloof
Angels! I 'm man and match,—this cudgel for my
flail,—
To thresh him, hoofs and horns, bat's wing and serpent's
tail!
A chance gone by! But then, what else does Hopeful
ding
Into the deafest ear except—hope, hope 's the thing?

Too late i' the day for me to thrid the windings: but
There 's still a way to win the race by death's short cut!
Did Master Faithful need climb the Delightful Mounts?
No, straight to Vanity Fair,—a fair, by all accounts,
Such as is held outside,—lords, ladies, grand and gay,—
Says he in the face of them, just what you hear me say.
And the Judges brought him in guilty, and brought him out
To die in the market-place—St. Peter's Green 's about
The same thing: there they flogged, flayed, buffeted, lanced with knives,
Pricked him with swords,—I 'll swear, he 'd full a cat's nine lives,—
So to his end at last came Faithful,—ha, ha, he!
Who holds the highest card? for there stands hid, you see,
Behind the rabble-rout, a chariot, pair and all:
He 's in, he 's off, he 's up, through clouds, at trumpet-call,
Carried the nearest way to Heaven-gate! Odds my life—
Has nobody a sword to spare? not even a knife?
Then hang me, draw and quarter! Tab—do the same by her!
O Master Worldly-Wiseman . . . that 's Master Interpreter,
Take the will, not the deed! Our gibbet 's handy close:
Forestall Last Judgment-Day! Be kindly, not morose!

There wants no earthly judge-and-jurying: here we stand—
Sentence our guilty selves: so, hang us out of hand!
Make haste for pity's sake! A single moment's loss
Means — Satan's lord once more: his whisper shoots across
All singing in my heart, all praying in my brain,
'It comes of heat and beer!'—hark how he guffaws plain!
'To-morrow you'll wake bright, and, in a safe skin, hug
Your sound selves, Tab and you, over a foaming jug!
You've had such qualms before, time out of mind!' He's right!
Did not we kick and cuff and curse away, that night
When home we blindly reeled, and left poor humpback Joe
I' the lurch to pay for what . . . somebody did, you know!
Both of us maundered then 'Lame humpback,—never more
Will he come limping, drain his tankard at our door!
He'll swing, while—somebody . . .' Says Tab, 'No, for I'll peach!'
'I'm for you, Tab,' cries I, 'there's rope enough for each!'

So blubbered we, and bussed, and went to bed upon
The grace of Tab's good thought: by morning, all was gone!
We laughed—'What 's life to him, a cripple of no account?'
Oh, waves increase around—I feel them mount and mount!
Hang us! To-morrow brings Tom Bearward with his bears:
One new black-muzzled brute beats Sackerson, he swears:
(Sackerson, for my money!) And, baiting o'er, the Brawl
They lead on Turner's Patch,—lads, lasses, up tails all,—
I 'm i' the thick o' the throng! That means the Iron Cage,
—Means the Lost Man inside! Where 's hope for such as wage
War against light? Light 's left, light 's here, I hold light still,
So does Tab—make but haste to hang us both! You will?"

I promise, when he stopped you might have heard a mouse
Squeak, such a death-like hush sealed up the old Mote House.

But when the mass of man sank meek upon his knees,
While Tab, alongside, wheezed a hoarse "Do hang us, please!"
Why, then the waters rose, no eye but ran with tears,
Hearts heaved, heads thumped, until, paying all past arrears
Of pity and sorrow, at last a regular scream outbroke
Of triumph, joy and praise.

My Lord Chief Justice spoke.
First mopping brow and cheek, where still, for one that budged,
Another bead broke fresh: "What Judge, that ever judged
Since first the world began, judged such a case as this?
Why, Master Bratts, long since, folk smelt you out, I wis!
I had my doubts, i' faith, each time you played the fox
Convicting geese of crime in yonder witness-box—
Yea, much did I misdoubt, the thief that stole her eggs
Was hardly goosey's self at Reynard's game, i' feggs!
Yet thus much was to praise—you spoke to point, direct—
Swore you heard, saw the theft: no jury could suspect—
Dared to suspect,—I 'll say,—a spot in white so clear:
Goosey was throttled, true: but thereof godly fear

Came of example set, much as our laws intend;
And, though a fox confessed, you proved the Judge's
friend.
What if I had my doubts? Suppose I gave them breath,
Brought you to bar: what work to do, ere 'Guilty,
Death,'—
Had paid our pains! What heaps of witnesses to drag
From holes and corners, paid from out the County's
bag!
Trial three dog-days long! *Amicus Curiæ*—that 's
Your title, no dispute—truth-telling Master Bratts!
Thank you, too, Mistress Tab! Why doubt one word
you say?
Hanging you both deserve, hanged both shall be this
day!
The tinker needs must be a proper man. I 've heard
He lies in Jail long since: if Quality 's good word
Warrants me letting loose,—some householder, I mean—
Freeholder, better still,—I don't say but—between
Now and next Sessions . . . Well! Consider of his
case,
I promise to, at least: we owe him so much grace.
Not that—no, God forbid!—I lean to think, as you,
The grace that such repent is any jail-bird's due:
I rather see the fruit of twelve years' pious reign—
Astræa Redux, Charles restored his rights again!

—Of which, another time! I somehow feel a peace
Stealing across the world. May deeds like this increase!
So, Master Sheriff, stay that sentence I pronounced
On those two dozen odd: deserving to be trounced
Soundly, and yet . . . well, well, at all events despatch
This pair of—shall I say, sinner-saints?—ere we catch
Their jail-distemper too. Stop tears, or I 'll indite
All weeping Bedfordshire for turning Bunyanite!"

So, forms were galloped through. If Justice, on the spur,
Proved somewhat expeditious, would Quality demur?
And happily hanged were they,—why lengthen out my tale?—
Where Bunyan's Statue stands facing where stood his Jail.

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

SECOND SERIES.

"You are sick, that 's sure"—they say:
"Sick of what?"—they disagree.
"'T is the brain"—thinks Doctor A;
"'T is the heart"—holds Doctor B;
"The liver—my life I 'd lay!"
"The lungs!" "The lights!"
Ah me!
So ignorant of man's whole
Of bodily organs plain to see—
So sage and certain, frank and free,
About what 's under lock and key—
Man's soul!

DRAMATIC IDYLS.

SECOND SERIES.

1880.

ECHETLOS.

HERE is a story shall stir you! Stand up, Greeks dead and gone,
Who breasted, beat Barbarians, stemmed Persia rolling on,
Did the deed and saved the world, for the day was Marathon!

No man but did his manliest, kept rank and fought away
In his tribe and file: up, back, out, down—was the spear-arm play:
Like a wind-whipt branchy wood, all spear-arms a-swing that day!

But one man kept no rank and his sole arm plied no spear,
As a flashing came and went, and a form i' the van, the rear,
Brightened the battle up, for he blazed now there, now here.

Nor helmed nor shielded, he! but, a goat-skin all his wear,
Like a tiller of the soil, with a clown's limbs broad and bare,
Went he ploughing on and on: he pushed with a ploughman's share.

Did the weak mid-line give way, as tunnies on whom the shark
Precipitates his bulk? Did the right-wing halt when, stark
On his heap of slain lay stretched Kallimachos Polemarch?

Did the steady phalanx falter? To the rescue, at the need,
The clown was ploughing Persia, clearing Greek earth of weed,
As he routed through the Sakian and rooted up the Mede.

But the deed done, battle won,—nowhere to be descried
On the meadow, by the stream, at the marsh,—look far and wide
From the foot of the mountain, no, to the last blood-plashed seaside,—

Not anywhere on view blazed the large limbs thonged and brown,
Shearing and clearing still with the share before which—down
To the dust went Persia's pomp, as he ploughed for Greece, that clown!

How spake the Oracle? "Care for no name at all!
Say but just this: 'We praise one helpful whom we call
The Holder of the Ploughshare.' The great deed ne'er grows small."

Not the great name! Sing—woe for the great name Míltiadés
And its end at Paros isle! Woe for Themistokles
—Satrap in Sardis court! Name not the clown like these!

CLIVE.

I AND Clive were friends—and why not? Friends! I think you laugh, my lad.
Clive it was gave England India, while your father gives —egad,
England nothing but the graceless boy who lures him on to speak—
"Well, Sir, you and Clive were comrades—" with a tongue thrust in your cheek!
Very true: in my eyes, your eyes, all the world's eyes, Clive was man,
I was, am and ever shall be—mouse, nay, mouse of all its clan
Sorriest sample, if you take the kitchen's estimate for fame;
While the man Clive—he fought Plassy, spoiled the clever foreign game,
Conquered and annexed and Englished!

Never mind! As o'er my punch

(You away) I sit of evenings,—silence, save for biscuit-crunch,
Black, unbroken,—thought grows busy, thrids each path-way of old years,
Notes this forthright, that meander, till the long-past life appears
Like an outspread map of country plodded through, each mile and rood,
Once, and well remembered still: I 'm startled in my solitude
Ever and anon by—what 's the sudden mocking light that breaks
On me as I slap the table till no rummer-glass but shakes
While I ask—aloud, I do believe, God help me!—"Was it thus?
Can it be that so I faltered, stopped when just one step for us—"
(Us,—you were not born, I grant, but surely some day born would be)
"—One bold step had gained a province" (figurative talk, you see)
"Got no end of wealth and honour,—yet I stood stock still no less?"
—"For I was not Clive," you comment: but it needs no Clive to guess

Wealth were handy, honour ticklish, did no writing on the wall

Warn me "Trespasser, 'ware man-traps!" Him who braves that notice—call

Hero! none of such heroics suit myself who read plain words,

Doff my hat, and leap no barrier. Scripture says the land 's the Lord's:

Louts then—what avail the thousand, noisy in a smock-frocked ring,

All-agog to have me trespass, clear the fence, be Clive their king?

Higher warrant must you show me ere I set one foot before

T'other in that dark direction, though I stand for evermore

Poor as Job and meek as Moses. Evermore? No! By-and-by

Job grows rich and Moses valiant, Clive turns out less wise than I.

Don't object "Why call him friend, then?" Power is power, my boy, and still

Marks a man,—God's gift magnific, exercised for good or ill.

You 've your boot now on my hearth-rug, tread what was a tiger's skin:

Rarely such a royal monster as I lodged the bullet in!
True, he murdered half a village, so his own death came to pass;
Still, for size and beauty, cunning, courage—ah, the brute he was!
Why, that Clive,—that youth, that greenhorn, that quill-driving clerk, in fine,—
He sustained a siege in Arcot. . . But the world knows! Pass the wine.

Where did I break off at? How bring Clive in? Oh, you mentioned "fear"!
Just so: and, said I, that minds me of a story you shall hear.

We were friends then, Clive and I: so, when the clouds, about the orb
Late supreme, encroaching slowly, surely, threatened to absorb
Ray by ray its noontide brilliance,—friendship might, with steadier eye
Drawing near, bear what had burned else, now no blaze—all majesty.
Too much bee's-wing floats my figure? Well, suppose a castle 's new:

None presume to climb its ramparts, none find foothold
sure for shoe
'Twixt those squares and squares of granite plating the
impervious pile
As his scale-mail's warty iron cuirasses a crocodile.
Reels that castle thunder-smitten, storm-dismantled? From without
Scrambling up by crack and crevice, every cockney prates
about
Towers—the heap he kicks now! turrets—just the measure
of his cane!
Will that do? Observe moreover—(same similitude
again)—
Such a castle seldom crumbles by sheer stress of cannonade:
'T is when foes are foiled and fighting 's finished that
vile rains invade,
Grass o'ergrows, o'ergrows till night-birds congregating
find no holes
Fit to build in like the topmost sockets made for
banner-poles.
So Clive crumbled slow in London—crashed at last.

A week before,
Dining with him,—after trying churchyard-chat of days
of yore,—

Both of us stopped, tired as tombstones, head-piece, foot-piece, when they lean
Each to other, drowsed in fog-smoke, o'er a coffined Past between.
As I saw his head sink heavy, guessed the soul's extinguishment
By the glazing eyeball, noticed how the furtive fingers went
Where a drug-box skulked behind the honest liquor,—"One more throw
Try for Clive!" thought I: "Let 's venture some good rattling question!" So—
"Come, Clive, tell us"—out I blurted—"what to tell in turn, years hence,
When my boy—suppose I have one—asks me on what evidence
I maintain my friend of Plassy proved a warrior every whit
Worth your Alexanders, Cæsars, Marlboroughs and—what said Pitt?—
Frederick the Fierce himself! Clive told me once"—I want to say—
"Which feat out of all those famous doings bore the bell away
—In his own calm estimation, mark you, not the mob's rough guess—

Which stood foremost as evincing what Clive called
courageousness!
Come! what moment of the minute, what speck-centre
in the wide
Circle of the action saw your mortal fairly deified?
(Let alone that filthy sleep-stuff, swallow bold this whole-
some Port!)
If a friend has leave to question,—when were you most
brave, in short?"

Up he arched his brows o' the instant—formidably Clive
again.
"When was I most brave? I 'd answer, were the instance
half as plain
As another instance that 's a brain-lodged crystal – curse
it!—here
Freezing when my memory touches—ugh!—the time I
felt most fear.
Ugh! I cannot say for certain if I showed fear—anyhow,
Fear I felt, and, very likely, shuddered, since I shiver
now."

"Fear!" smiled I. "Well, that 's the rarer: that 's a
specimen to seek,
Ticket up in one's museum, *Mind-Freaks, Lord Clive's
Fear, Unique!*"

Down his brows dropped. On the table painfully he pored as though
Tracing, in the stains and streaks there, thoughts encrusted long ago.
When he spoke 't was like a lawyer reading word by word some will,
Some blind jungle of a statement,—beating on and on until
Out there leaps fierce life to fight with.

"This fell in my factor-days.
Desk-drudge, slaving at St. David's, one must game, or drink, or craze.
I chose gaming: and, — because your high-flown gamesters hardly take
Umbrage at a factor's elbow if the factor pays his stake,—
I was winked at in a circle where the company was choice,
Captain This and Major That, men high of colour, loud of voice,
Yet indulgent, condescending to the modest juvenile
Who not merely risked but lost his hard-earned guineas with a smile.

"Down I sat to cards, one evening,—had for my antagonist
Somebody whose name 's a secret—you 'll know why—so, if you list,

Call him Cock o' the Walk, my scarlet son of Mars from
head to heel!
Play commenced: and, whether Cocky fancied that a
clerk must feel
Quite sufficient honour came of bending over one green
baize,
I the scribe with him the warrior,—guessed no penman
dared to raise
Shadow of objection should the honour stay but playing
end
More or less abruptly,—whether disinclined he grew to
spend
Practice strictly scientific on a booby born to stare
At—not ask of—lace-and-ruffles if the hand they hide
plays fair,—
Anyhow, I marked a movement when he bade me 'Cut!'

"I rose.
'Such the new manœuvre, Captain? I'm a novice: knowledge grows.
What, you force a card, you cheat, Sir?'

"Never did a thunder-clap
Cause emotion, startle Thyrsis locked with Chloe in his lap,
As my word and gesture (down I flung my cards to join
the pack)

Fired the man of arms, whose visage, simply red before, turned black.

When he found his voice, he stammered 'That expression once again!'

"'Well, you forced a card and cheated!'

"'Possibly a factor's brain,
Busied with his all-important balance of accounts, may deem
Weighing words superfluous trouble: *cheat* to clerkly ears may seem
Just the joke for friends to venture: but we are not friends, you see!
When a gentleman is joked with,—if he's good at repartee,
He rejoins, as do I—Sirrah, on your knees, withdraw in full!
Beg my pardon, or be sure a kindly bullet through your skull
Lets in light and teaches manners to what brain it finds! Choose quick—
Have your life snuffed out or, kneeling, pray me trim yon candle-wick!'

"'Well, you cheated!'

"Then outbroke a howl from all the friends around.
To his feet sprang each in fury, fists were clenched and
teeth were ground.
End it! no time like the present! Captain, yours were
our disgrace!
No delay, begin and finish! Stand back, leave the pair
a space!
Let civilians be instructed: henceforth simply ply the
pen,
Fly the sword! This clerk's no swordsman? Suit him
with a pistol, then!
Even odds! A dozen paces 'twixt the most and least
expert
Make a dwarf a giant's equal: nay, the dwarf, if he's
alert,
Likelier hits the broader target!'

"Up we stood accordingly.
As they handed me the weapon, such was my soul's
thirst to try
Then and there conclusions with this bully, tread on and
stamp out
Every spark of his existence, that,—crept close to, curled
about
By that toying tempting teasing fool-forefinger's middle
joint,—

Don't you guess?—the trigger yielded. Gone my chance!
and at the point
Of such prime success moreover: scarce an inch above
his head
Went my ball to hit the wainscot. He was living, I was
dead.

"Up he marched in flaming triumph—'t was his right,
mind!—up, within
Just an arm's length. 'Now, my clerkling,' chuckled
Cocky with a grin
As the levelled piece quite touched me, 'Now, Sir
Counting-House, repeat
That expression which I told you proved bad manners!
Did I cheat?'

"'Cheat you did, you knew you cheated, and, this
moment, know as well.
As for me, my homely breeding bids you—fire and go to
Hell!'

"Twice the muzzle touched my forehead. Heavy barrel,
flurried wrist,
Either spoils a steady lifting. Thrice: then, 'Laugh at
Hell who list,

I can't! God's no fable either. Did this boy's eye
wink once? No!
There's no standing him and Hell and God all three
against me,—so,
I did cheat!'

"And down he threw the pistol, out rushed—
by the door
Possibly, but, as for knowledge if by chimney, roof or
floor,
He effected disappearance—I'll engage no glance was
sent
That way by a single starer, such a blank astonishment
Swallowed up their senses: as for speaking—mute they
stood as mice

"Mute not long, though! Such reaction, such a hubbub
in a trice!
'Rogue and rascal! Who'd have thought it? What's
to be expected next,
When His Majesty's Commission serves a sharper as
pretext
For . . . But where's the need of wasting time now?
Nought requires delay:
Punishment the Service cries for: let disgrace be wiped
away

Publicly, in good broad daylight! Resignation? No, indeed
Drum and fife must play the Rogue's March, rank and file be free to speed
Tardy marching on the rogue's part by appliance in the rear
—Kicks administered shall right this wronged civilian,—never fear,
Mister Clive, for—though a clerk—you bore yourself—suppose we say—
Just as would beseem a soldier!'

"'Gentlemen, attention—pray!
First, one word!'

"I passed each speaker severally in review.
When I had precise their number, names and styles, and fully knew
Over whom my supervision thenceforth must extend,—why, then——

"'Some five minutes since, my life lay—as you all saw, gentlemen—
At the mercy of your friend there. Not a single voice was raised
In arrest of judgment, not one tongue—before my powder blazed—

Ventured "Can it be the youngster blundered, really seemed to mark
Some irregular proceeding? We conjecture in the dark,
Guess at random,—still, for sake of fair play—what if for a freak,
In a fit of absence,—such things have been!—if our friend proved weak
—What 's the phrase?—corrected fortune! Look into the case, at least!"
Who dared interpose between the altar's victim and the priest?
Yet he spared me! You eleven! Whosoever, all or each,
To the disadvantage of the man who spared me, utters speech
—To his face, behind his back,—that speaker has to do with me:
Me who promise, if positions change and mine the chance should be,
Not to imitate your friend and waive advantage!'

"Twenty-five
Years ago this matter happened: and 't is certain," added Clive,
"Never, to my knowledge, did Sir Cocky have a single breath

Breathed against him: lips were closed throughout his life, or since his death,
For if he be dead or living I can tell no more than you.
All I know is—Cocky had one chance more; how he used it,—grew
Out of such unlucky habits, or relapsed, and back again
Brought the late-ejected devil with a score more in his train,—
That 's for you to judge. Reprieval I procured, at any rate.
Ugh—the memory of that minute's fear makes gooseflesh rise! Why prate
Longer? You 've my story, there 's your instance: fear I did, you see!"

"Well"—I hardly kept from laughing—"if I see it, thanks must be
Wholly to your Lordship's candour. Not that—in a common case—
When a bully caught at cheating thrusts a pistol in one's face,
I should underrate, believe me, such a trial to the nerve!
'T is no joke, at one-and-twenty, for a youth to stand nor swerve.
Fear I naturally look for—unless, of all men alive,

I am forced to make exception when I come to Robert
Clive.
Since at Arcot, Plassy, elsewhere, he and death—the
whole world knows—
Came to somewhat closer quarters."

Quarters? Had we come to blows,
Clive and I, you had not wondered—up he sprang so,
out he rapped
Such a round of oaths—no matter! I'll endeavour to
adapt
To our modern usage words he—well, 't was friendly
licence—flung
At me like so many fire-balls, fast as he could wag his
tongue.

"You—a soldier? You—at Plassy? Yours the faculty
to nick
Instantaneously occasion when your foe, if lightning-
quick,
—At his mercy, at his malice,—has you, through some
stupid inch
Undefended in your bulwark? Thus laid open,—not to
flinch
—That needs courage, you 'll concede me. Then, look
here! Suppose the man,

Checking his advance, his weapon still extended, not a span
Distant from my temple,—curse him!—quietly had bade me 'There!
Keep your life, calumniator!—worthless life I freely spare:
Mine you freely would have taken—murdered me and my good fame
Both at once—and all the better! Go, and thank your own bad aim
Which permits me to forgive you! What if, with such words as these,
He had cast away his weapon? How should I have borne me, please?
Nay, I 'll spare you pains and tell you. This, and only this, remained—
Pick his weapon up and use it on myself. I so had gained
Sleep the earlier, leaving England probably to pay on still
Rent and taxes for half India, tenant at the Frenchman's will."

"Such the turn," said I, "the matter takes with you? Then I abate
—No, by not one jot nor tittle,—of your act my estimate.

Fear—I wish I could detect there: courage fronts me,
plain enough—
Call it desperation, madness—never mind! for here 's in
rough
Why, had mine been such a trial, fear had overcome
disgrace.
True, disgrace were hard to bear: but such a rush against
God's face
—None of that for me, Lord Plassy, since I go to church
at times,
Say the creed my mother taught me! Many years in
foreign climes
Rub some marks away—not all, though! We poor
sinners reach life's brink,
Overlook what rolls beneath it, recklessly enough, but
think
There 's advantage in what 's left us—ground to stand
on, time to call
'Lord, have mercy!' ere we topple over—do not leap,
that 's all!"

Oh, he made no answer,—re-absorbed into his cloud. I
caught
Something like "Yes—courage: only fools will call it
fear."
If aught

Comfort you, my great unhappy hero Clive, in that I heard,
Next week, how your own hand dealt you doom, and uttered just the word
"Fearfully courageous!"—this, be sure, and nothing else I groaned.
I 'm no Clive, nor parson either: Clive's worst deed—we 'll hope condoned.

MULĔYKEH.

If a stranger passed the tent of Hóseyn, he cried "A churl's!"
Or haply "God help the man who has neither salt nor bread!"
—"Nay," would a friend exclaim, "he needs nor pity nor scorn
More than who spends small thought on the shore-sand, picking pearls,
—Holds but in light esteem the seed-sort, bears instead
On his breast a moon-like prize, some orb which of night makes morn.

"What if no flocks and herds enrich the son of Sinán?
They went when his tribe was mulct, ten thousand camels the due,
Blood-value paid perforce for a murder done of old.
'God gave them, let them go! But never since time began,

Muléykeh, peerless mare, owned master the match of you,
And you are my prize, my Pearl: I laugh at men's land
and gold!"

"So in the pride of his soul laughs Hóseyn—and right,
I say.
Do the ten steeds run a race of glory? Outstripping all,
Ever Muléykeh stands first steed at the victor's staff.
Who started, the owner's hope, gets shamed and named,
that day.
'Silence,' or, last but one, is 'The Cuffed,' as we use to call
Whom the paddock's lord thrusts forth. Right, Hóseyn,
I say, to laugh!"

"Boasts he Muléykeh the Pearl?" the stranger replies:
"Be sure
On him I waste nor scorn nor pity, but lavish both
On Duhl the son of Sheybán, who withers away in heart
For envy of Hóseyn's luck. Such sickness admits no cure.
A certain poet has sung, and sealed the same with an oath,
'For the vulgar—flocks and herds! The Pearl is a prize
apart.'"

Lo, Duhl the son of Sheybán comes riding to Hóseyn's
tent,
And he casts his saddle down, and enters and "Peace!"
bids he.

"You are poor, I know the cause: my plenty shall mend
the wrong.
'T is said of your Pearl—the price of a hundred camels
spent
In her purchase were scarce ill paid: such prudence is
far from me
Who proffer a thousand. Speak! Long parley may last
too long."

Said Hóseyn "You feed young beasts a many, of famous
breed,
Slit-eared, unblemished, fat, true offspring of Múzennem:
There stumbles no weak-eyed she in the line as it climbs
the hill.
But I love Muléykeh's face: her forefront whitens indeed
Like a yellowish wave's cream-crest. Your camels—go
gaze on them!
Her fetlock is foam-splashed too. Myself am the richer
still."

A year goes by: lo, back to the tent again rides Duhl.
"You are open-hearted, ay—moist-handed, a very prince.
Why should I speak of sale? Be the mare your simple
gift!
My son is pined to death for her beauty: my wife
prompts 'Fool,

Beg for his sake the Pearl! Be God the rewarder, since
God pays debts seven for one: who squanders on Him
shows thrift.'"

Said Hóseyn "God gives each man one life, like a lamp,
then gives
That lamp due measure of oil: lamp lighted—hold high,
wave wide
Its comfort for others to share! once quench it, what
help is left?
The oil of your lamp is your son: I shine while Mu-
léykeh lives.
Would I beg your son to cheer my dark if Muléykeh died?
It is life against life: what good avails to the life-
bereft?"

Another year, and—hist! What craft is it Duhl designs?
He alights not at the door of the tent as he did last time,
But, creeping behind, he gropes his stealthy way by the
trench
Half-round till he finds the flap in the folding, for night
combines
With the robber—and such is he: Duhl, covetous up to
crime,
Must wring from Hóseyn's grasp the Pearl, by whatever
the wrench.

"He was hunger-bitten, I heard: I tempted with half my store,
And a gibe was all my thanks. Is he generous like Spring dew?
Account the fault to me who chaffered with such an one!
He has killed, to feast chance comers, the creature he rode: nay, more—
For a couple of singing-girls his robe has he torn in two:
I will beg! Yet I nowise gained by the tale of my wife and son.

"I swear by the Holy House, my head will I never wash
Till I filch his Pearl away. Fair dealing I tried, then guile,
And now I resort to force. He said we must live or die:
Let him die, then,—let me live! Be bold—but not too rash!
I have found me a peeping-place: breast, bury your breathing while
I explore for myself! Now, breathe! He deceived me not, the spy!

"As he said—there lies in peace Hóseyn—how happy! Beside
Stands tethered the Pearl: thrice winds her headstall about his wrist:

'T is therefore he sleeps so sound—the moon through the roof reveals.
And, loose on his left, stands too that other, known far and wide,
Buhéyseh, her sister born: fleet is she yet ever missed
The winning tail's fire-flash a-stream past the thunderous heels.

"No less she stands saddled and bridled, this second, in case some thief
Should enter and seize and fly with the first, as I mean to do.
What then? The Pearl is the Pearl: once mount her we both escape."
Through the skirt-fold in glides Duhl,—so a serpent disturbs no leaf
In a bush as he parts the twigs entwining a nest: clean through,
He is noiselessly at his work: as he planned, he performs the rape.

He has set the tent-door wide, has buckled the girth, has clipped
The headstall away from the wrist he leaves thrice bound as before,

He springs on the Pearl, is launched on the desert like
bolt from bow.
Up starts our plundered man: from his breast though
the heart be ripped,
Yet his mind has the mastery: behold, in a minute
more,
He is out and off and away on Buhéyseh, whose worth
we know!

And Hóseyn—his blood turns flame, he has learned long
since to ride,
And Buhéyseh does her part,—they gain—they are gaining
fast
On the fugitive pair, and Duhl has Ed-Dárraj to cross
and quit,
And to reach the ridge El-Sabán,—no safety till that be
spied!
And Buhéyseh is, bound by bound, but a horse-length off
at last,
For the Pearl has missed the tap of the heel, the touch
of the bit.

She shortens her stride, she chafes at her rider the
strange and queer:
Buhéyseh is mad with hope—beat sister she shall and
must

Though Duhl, of the hand and heel so clumsy, she has
to thank.
She is near now, nose by tail—they are neck by croup—
joy! fear!
What folly makes Hóseyn shout "Dog Duhl, Damned
son of the Dust,
Touch the right ear and press with your foot my Pearl's
left flank!"

And Duhl was wise at the word, and Muléykeh as prompt
perceived
Who was urging redoubled pace, and to hear him was to
obey,
And a leap indeed gave she, and evanished for ever-
more.
And Hóseyn looked one long last look as who, all
bereaved,
Looks, fain to follow the dead so far as the living may:
Then he turned Buhéyseh's neck slow homeward, weeping
sore.

And, lo, in the sunrise, still sat Hóseyn upon the ground
Weeping: and neighbours came, the tribesmen of Bénu-
Asád
In the vale of green Er-Rass, and they questioned him
of his grief;

And he told from first to last how, serpent-like, Duhl had wound
His way to the nest, and how Duhl rode like an ape, so bad!
And how Buhéyseh did wonders, yet Pearl remained with the thief.

And they jeered him, one and all: "Poor Hóseyn is crazed past hope!
How else had he wrought himself his ruin, in fortune's spite?
To have simply held the tongue were a task for a boy or girl,
And here were Muléykeh again, the eyed like an antelope,
The child of his heart by day, the wife of his breast by night!"—
"And the beaten in speed!" wept Hóseyn: "You never have loved my Pearl."

PIETRO OF ABANO.

Petrus Aponensis—there was a magician!
When that strange adventure happened, which I mean
to tell my hearers,
Nearly had he tried all trades—beside physician,
Architect, astronomer, astrologer,—or worse:
How else, as the old books warrant, was he able,
All at once, through all the world, to prove the promptest
of appearers
Where was prince to cure, tower to build as high as
Babel,
Star to name or sky-sign read,—yet pouch, for pains, a
curse?

—Curse: for when a vagrant,—foot-sore, travel-tattered,
Now a young man, now an old man, Turk or Arab, Jew
or Gipsy,—
Proffered folk in passing—O for pay, what mattered?—
"I 'll be doctor, I 'll play builder, star I 'll name—sign
read!"

Soon as prince was cured, tower built, and fate predicted,
"Who may you be?" came the question, when he answered "*Petrus ipse*,"
"Just as we divined!" cried folk—"A wretch convicted
Long ago of dealing with the devil—you indeed!"

So, they cursed him roundly, all his labour's payment,
Motioned him—the convalescent prince would—to vacate the presence:
Babylonians plucked his beard and tore his raiment,
Drove him from that tower he built: while, had he peered at stars,
Town howled "Stone the quack who styles our Dog-star—Sirius!"
Country yelled "Aroint the churl who prophesies we take no pleasance
Under vine and fig-tree, since the year 's delirious,
Bears no crop of any kind,—all through the planet Mars!"

Straightway would the whilom youngster grow a grisard,
Or, as case might hap, the hoary eld drop off and show a stripling.
Town and country groaned—indebted to a wizard!

"Curse—nay, kick and cuff him—fit requital of his pains!
Gratitude in word or deed were wasted truly!
Rather make the Church amends by crying out on,
cramping, crippling
One who, on pretence of serving man, serves duly
Man's arch foe: not ours, be sure, but Satan's—his the
gains!"

Peter grinned and bore it, such disgraceful usage:
Somehow, cuffs and kicks and curses seem ordained his
like to suffer:
Prophet's pay with Christians, now as in the Jews' age,
Still is—stoning: so, he meekly took his wage and went,
—Safe again was found ensconced in those old quarters,
Padua's blackest blindest by-street,—none the worse,
nay, somewhat tougher:
'Calculating," quoth he, "soon I join the martyrs,
Since, who magnify my lore on burning me are bent."*

* "Studiando le mie cifre col compasso,
Rilevo che sarò presto sotterra,
Perchè del mio saper si fa gran chiasso,
E gl' ignoranti m' hanno mosso guerra."

Said to have been found in a well at Abano in the last century. They were extemporaneously Englished thus: not as Father Prout chose to prefer them:—

Studying my ciphers with the compass,
I reckon—I soon shall be below-ground;
Because of my lore folk make great rumpus,
And war on myself makes each dull rogue round.

Therefore, on a certain evening, to his alley
Peter slunk, all bruised and broken, sore in body, sick in spirit,
Just escaped from Cairo where he launched a galley
Needing neither sails nor oars nor help of wind or tide,
—Needing but the fume of fire to set a-flying
Wheels like mad which whirled you quick—North, South, where'er you pleased require it,—
That is—would have done so had not priests come prying,
Broke his engine up and bastinadoed him beside.

As he reached his lodging, stopped there unmolested,
(Neighbours feared him, urchins fled him, few were bold enough to follow)
While his fumbling fingers tried the lock and tested
Once again the queer key's virtue, oped the sullen door,—
Someone plucked his sleeve, cried "Master, pray your pardon!
Grant a word to me who patient wait you in your archway's hollow!
Hard on you men's hearts are: be not your heart hard on
Me who kiss your garment's hem, O Lord of magic lore!

"Mage—say I, who no less, scorning tittle-tattle,

To the vulgar give no credence when they prate of Peter's magic,
Deem his art brews tempest, hurts the crops and cattle,
Hinders fowls from laying eggs and worms from spinning silk,
Rides upon a he-goat, mounts at need a broomstick:
While the price he pays for this (so turns to comic what was tragic)
Is—he may not drink—dreads like the Day of Doom's tick—
One poor drop of sustenance ordained mere men—that 's milk!

"Tell such tales to Padua! Think me no such dullard!
Not from these benighted parts did I derive my breath and being!
I am from a land whose cloudless skies are coloured
Livelier, suns orb largelier, airs seem incense,—while, on earth—
What, instead of grass, our fingers and our thumbs cull,
Proves true moly! sounds and sights there help the body's hearing, seeing,
Till the soul grows godlike: brief,—you front no numbscull
Shaming by ineptitude the Greece that gave him birth!

"Mark within my eye its iris mystic-lettered—

That 's my name! and note my ear—its swan-shaped
cavity, my emblem!
Mine 's the swan-like nature born to fly unfettered
Over land and sea in search of knowledge—food for
song.
Art denied the vulgar! Geese grow fat on barley,
Swans require ethereal provend, undesirous to resemble
'em—
Soar to seek Apollo,—favoured with a parley
Such as, Master, you grant me—who will not hold you
long.

"Leave to learn to sing—for that your swan petitions:
Master, who possess the secret, say not nay to such a
suitor!
All I ask is—bless mine, purest of ambitions!
Grant me leave to make my kind wise, free, and happy!
How?
Just by making me—as you are mine—their model!
Geese have goose-thoughts: make a swan their teacher
first, then co-adjutor,—
Let him introduce swan-notions to each noddle,—
Geese will soon grow swans, and men become what I am
now!

"That 's the only magic—had but fools discernment,

Could they probe and pass into the solid through the soft and seeming!
Teach me such true magic—now and no adjournment!
Teach your art of making fools subserve the man of mind!
Magic is the power we men of mind should practise,
Draw fools to become our drudges, docile henceforth, never dreaming—
While they do our hests for fancied gain—the fact is
What they toil and moil to get proves falsehood: truth 's behind!

"See now! you conceive some fabric—say, a mansion
Meet for monarch's pride and pleasure: this is truth—a thought has fired you,
Made you fain to give some cramped concept expansion,
Put your faculty to proof, fulfil your nature's task.
First you fascinate the monarch's self: he fancies
He it was devised the scheme you execute as he inspired you:
He in turn sets slaving insignificance,
Toiling, moiling till your structure stands there—all you ask!

"Soon the monarch 's known for what he was—a ninny:

Soon the rabble-rout leave labour, take their work-day
wage and vanish:
Soon the late puffed bladder, pricked, shows lank and
skinny—
'Who was its inflator?' ask we, 'whose the giant lungs?'
Petri en pulmones! What though men prove ingrates?
Let them—so they stop at crucifixion—buffet, ban and
banish!
Peter's power 's apparent: human praise—its din grates
Harsh as blame on ear unused to aught save angels'
tongues.

"Ay, there have been always, since our world existed,
Mages who possessed the secret—needed but to stand
still, fix eye
On the foolish mortal: straight was he enlisted
Soldier, scholar, servant, slave—no matter for the style!
Only through illusion; ever what seemed profit—
Love or lucre—justified obedience to the *Ipse dixi:*
Work done—palace reared from pavement up to soffit—
Was it strange if builders smelt out cheating all the
while?

"Let them pelt and pound, bruise, bray you in a mortar!
What 's the odds to you who seek reward of quite another
nature?

You 've enrolled your name where sages of your sort are,
—Michael of Constantinople, Hans of Halberstadt!
Nay and were you nameless, still you 've your conviction
You it was and only you—what signifies the nomenclature?—
Ruled the world in fact, though how you ruled be fiction
Fit for fools: true wisdom's magic you if e'er man—had 't!

"But perhaps you ask me 'Since each ignoramus
While he profits by such magic persecutes the benefactor,
What should I expect but—once I render famous
You as Michael, Hans and Peter—just one ingrate more?
If the vulgar prove thus, whatsoe'er the pelf be,
Pouched through my beneficence—and doom me dungeoned, chained, or racked, or
Fairly burned outright—how grateful will yourself be
When, his secret gained, you match your—master just before?'

"That 's where I await you! Please, revert a little!

What do folk report about you if not this—which,
though chimeric,
Still, as figurative, suits you to a tittle—
That,—although the elements obey your nod and wink,
Fades or flowers the herb you chance to smile or sigh at,
While your frown bids earth quake palled by obscuration
atmospheric,—
Brief, although through nature nought resists your *fiat*,
There 's yet one poor substance mocks you—milk you
may not drink!

"Figurative language! Take my explanation!
Fame with fear, and hate with homage, these your art
procures in plenty.
All 's but daily dry bread: what makes moist the ration?
Love, the milk that sweetens man his meal—alas, you
lack:
I am he who, since he fears you not, can love you.
Love is born of heart not mind, *de corde natus haud de
mente*;
Touch my heart and love 's yours, sure as shines above
you
Sun by day and star by night though earth should go to
wrack!

"Stage by stage you lift me—kiss by kiss I hallow

Whose but your dear hand my helper, punctual as at
each new impulse
I approach my aim? Shell chipped, the caglet callow
Needs a parent's pinion-push to quit the eyrie's edge:
But once fairly launched forth, denizen of æther,
While each effort sunward bids the blood more freely
through each limb pulse,
Sure the parent feels, as gay they soar together,
Fully are all pains repaid when love redeems its pledge!"

Then did Peter's tristful visage lighten somewhat,
Vent a watery smile as though inveterate mistrust were
thawing.
"Well, who knows?" he slow broke silence. "Mortals
—come what
Come there may—are still the dupes of hope there 's
luck in store.
Many scholars seek me, promise mounts and marvels:
Here stand I to witness how they step 'twixt me and
clapperclawing!
Dry bread,—that I 've gained me: truly I should starve
else:
But of milk, no drop was mine! Well, shuffle cards
once more!"

At the word of promise thus implied, our stranger—

What can he but cast his arms, in rapture of embrace,
round Peter?
"Hold! I choke!" the mage grunts. "Shall I in the
manger
Any longer play the dog? Approach, my calf, and feed!
Bene . . . won't you wait for grace?" But sudden
incense
Wool-white, serpent-solid, curled up—perfume growing
sweet and sweeter
Till it reached the young man's nose and seemed to win
sense
Soul and all from out his brain through nostril: yes,
indeed!

Presently the young man rubbed his eyes. "Where am I?
Too much bother over books! Some reverie has proved
amusing.
What did Peter prate of? 'Faith, my brow is clammy!
How my head throbs, how my heart thumps! Can it
be I swooned?
Oh, I spoke my speech out—cribbed from Plato's
tractate,
Dosed him with 'the Fair and Good,' swore—Dog of
Egypt—I was choosing
Plato's way to serve men! What 's the hour? Exact
eight!

Home now, and to-morrow never mind how Plato mooned!

"Peter has the secret! Fair and Good are products
(So he said) of Foul and Evil: one must bring to pass the other.
Just as poisons grow drugs, steal through sundry odd ducts
Doctors name, and ultimately issue safe and changed.
You 'd abolish poisons, treat disease with dainties
Such as suit the sound and sane? With all such kickshaws vain you pother!
Arsenic 's the stuff puts force into the faint eyes,
Opium sets the brain to rights—by cark and care deranged.

"What, he 's safe within door?—would escape—no question—
Thanks, since thanks and more I owe, and mean to pay in time befitting.
What most presses now is—after night's digestion,
Peter, of thy precepts!—promptest practice of the same.
Let me see! The wise man, first of all, scorns riches:
But to scorn them must obtain them: none believes in his permitting
Gold to lie ungathered: who picks up, then pitches
Gold away—philosophizes: none disputes his claim.

"So with worldly honours: 't is by abdicating,
Incontestably he proves he could have kept the crown discarded.
Sulla cuts a figure, leaving off dictating:
Simpletons laud private life? 'The grapes are sour,' laugh we.
So, again—but why continue? All 's tumultuous
Here: my head 's a-whirl with knowledge. Speedily shall be rewarded
He who taught me! Greeks prove ingrates? So insult you us?
When your teaching bears its first-fruits, Peter—wait and see!"

As the word, the deed proved; ere a brief year's passage,
Fop—that fool he made the jokes on—now he made the jokes for, *gratis:*
Hunks—that hoarder, long left lonely in his crass age—
Found now one appreciative deferential friend:
Powder-paint-and-patch, Hag Jezebel—recovered,
Strange to say, the power to please, got courtship till she cried *Jam satis!*
Fop be-flattered, Hunks be-friended, Hag be-lovered—
Nobody o'erlooked, save God—he soon attained his end.

As he lounged at ease one morning in his villa,
(Hag's the dowry) estimated (Hunks' bequest) his coin in coffer,
Mused on how a fool's good word (Fop's word) could fill a
Social circle with his praise, promote him man of mark,—
All at once—"An old friend fain would see your Highness!"
There stood Peter, skeleton and scarecrow, plain writ *Phi-lo-so-pher*
In the woe-worn face—for yellowness and dryness,
Parchment—with a pair of eyes—one hope their feeble spark.

"Did I counsel rightly? Have you, in accordance,
Prospered greatly, dear my pupil? Sure, at just the stage I find you,
When your hand may draw me forth from the mad war-dance
Savages are leading round your master—down, not dead.
Padua wants to burn me: baulk them, let me linger
Life out—rueful though its remnant—hid in some safe hole behind you!
Prostrate here I lie: quick, help with but a finger
Lest I house in safety's self—a tombstone o'er my head!

"Lodging, bite and sup, with—now and then—a copper

—Alms for any poorer still, if such there be,—is all my asking.
Take me for your bedesman,—nay, if you think proper,
Menial merely,—such my perfect passion for repose!
Yes, from out your plenty Peter craves a pittance
—Leave to thaw his frozen hands before the fire whereat you 're basking!
Double though your debt were, grant this boon—remittance
He proclaims of obligation: 't is himself that owes!"

"Venerated Master—can it be, such treatment
Learning meets with, magic fails to guard you from, by all appearance?
Strange! for, as you entered,—what the famous feat meant,
I was full of,—why you reared that fabric, Padua's boast.
Nowise for man's pride, man's pleasure, did you slyly
Raise it, but man's seat of rule whereby the world should soon have clearance
(Happy world) from such a rout as now so vilely
Handles you—and hampers me, for which I grieve the most.

"Since if it got wind you now were my familiar,

How could I protect you—nay, defend myself against the rabble?
Wait until the mob, now masters, willy-nilly are
Servants as they should be: then has gratitude full play!
Surely this experience shows how unbefitting
'T is that minds like mine should rot in ease and plenty. Geese may gabble,
Gorge, and keep the ground: but swans are soon for quitting
Earthly fare—as fain would I, your swan, if taught the way.

"Teach me, then, to rule men, have them at my pleasure!
Solely for their good, of course,—impart a secret worth rewarding,
Since the proper life's-prize! Tantalus's treasure
Aught beside proves, vanishes and leaves no trace at all.
Wait awhile, nor press for payment prematurely!
Over-haste defrauds you. Thanks! since,—even while I speak,—discarding
Sloth and vain delights, I learn how—swiftly, surely—
Magic sways the sceptre, wears the crown and wield the ball!

"Gone again—what, is he? 'Faith, he 's soon disposed of!

Peter's precepts work already, put within my lump their leaven!
Ay, we needs must don glove would we pluck the rose — doff
Silken garment would we climb the tree and take its fruit.
Why sharp thorn, rough rind? To keep unviolated
Either prize! We garland us, we mount from earth to feast in heaven,
Just because exist what once we estimated
Hindrances which, better taught, as helps we now compute.

"Foolishly I turned disgusted from my fellows!
Pits of ignorance — to fill, and heaps of prejudice — to level —
Multitudes in motley, whites and blacks and yellows —
What a hopeless task it seemed to discipline the host!
Now I see my error. Vices act like virtues
— Not alone because they guard — sharp thorns — the rose we first dishevel,
Not because they scrape, scratch — rough rind — through the dirt-shoes
Bare feet cling to bole with, while the half-mooned boot we boast.

"No, my aim is nobler, more disinterested!

Man shall keep what seemed to thwart him, since it
proves his true assistance,
Leads to ascertaining which head is the best head,
Would he crown his body, rule its members—lawless else.
Ignorant the horse stares, by deficient vision
Takes a man to be a monster, lets him mount, then, twice
the distance
Horse could trot unridden, gallops—dream Elysian!—
Dreaming that his dwarfish guide 's a giant,—jockeys
tell 's."

Brief, so worked the spell, he promptly had a riddance:
Heart and brain no longer felt the pricks which passed
for conscience-scruples:
Free henceforth his feet,—*Per Bacco*, how they did
dance
Merrily through lets and checks that stopped the way
before!
Politics the prize now,—such adroit adviser,
Opportune suggester, with the tact that triples and
quadruples
Merit in each measure,—never did the Kaiser
Boast a subject such a statesman, friend, and something
more!

As he, up and down, one noonday, paced his closet

—Council o'er, each spark (his hint) blown flame, by
colleagues' breath applauded,
Strokes of statecraft hailed with "*Salomo si nôsset!*"
(His the nostrum)—every throw for luck come double-
six,—
As he, pacing, hugged himself in satisfaction,
Thump—the door went. "What, the Kaiser? By none
else were I defrauded
Thus of well-earned solace. Since 't is fate's exaction,—
Enter, Liege my Lord! Ha, Peter, you here? *Teneor
vix!*"

"Ah, Sir, none the less, contain you, nor wax irate!
You so lofty, I so lowly,—vast the space which yawns
between us!
Still, methinks, you—more than ever—at a high rate
Needs must prize poor Peter's secret since it lifts you thus.
Grant me now the boon whereat before you boggled!
Ten long years your march has moved—one triumph—
(though *e* 's short)—*hactēnus*,
While I down and down disastrously have joggled
Till I pitch against Death's door, the true *Nec Ultra Plus*.

"Years ago—some ten 't is—since I sought for shelter,
Craved in your whole house a closet, out of all your
means a comfort.

Now you soar above these: as is gold to spelter
So is power—you urged with reason—paramount to wealth.
Power you boast in plenty: let it grant me refuge!
Houseroom now is out of question: find for me some stronghold—some fort—
Privacy wherein, immured, shall this blind deaf huge
Monster of a mob let stay the soul I 'd save by stealth!

"Ay, for all too much with magic have I tampered!
—Lost the world, and gained, I fear, a certain place I 'm to describe loth!
Still, if prayer and fasting tame the pride long pampered,
Mercy may be mine: amendment never comes too late.
How can I amend beset by cursers, kickers?
Pluck this brand from out the burning! Once away, I take my Bible-oath,
Never more—so long as life's weak lamp-flame flickers—
No, not once I 'll tease you, but in silence bear my fate!"

" Gently, good my Genius, Oracle unerring!
Strange now! can you guess on what—as in you peeped —it was I pondered?
You and I are both of one mind in preferring
Power to wealth, but—here 's the point—what sort of power, I ask?

Ruling men is vulgar, easy and ignoble:
Rid yourself of conscience, quick you have at beck and
call the fond herd.
But who wields the crozier, down may fling the crow-bill:
That 's the power I covet now; soul 's sway o'er souls—
my task!

"'Well but,' you object, 'you have it, who by glamour
Dress up lies to look like truths, mask folly in the garb
of reason:
Your soul acts on theirs, sure, when the people clamour
Hold their peace, now fight now fondle,—earwigged
through the brains.'
Possibly! but still the operation 's mundane,
Grosser than a taste demands which—craving manna—
kecks at peason—
Power o'er men by wants material: why should one deign
Rule by sordid hopes and fears—a grunt for all one's
pains?

"No, if men must praise me, let them praise to purpose!
Would we move the world, not earth but heaven must be
our fulcrum—*pou sto!*
Thus I seek to move it: Master, why intérpose—
Baulk my climbing close on what 's the ladder's topmost
round?

Statecraft 't is I step from: when by priestcraft hoisted
Up to where my foot may touch the highest rung which
fate allows toe,
Then indeed ask favour! On you shall be foisted
No excuse: I 'll pay my debt, each penny of the pound!

"Ho, my knaves without there! Lead this worthy down-
stairs!
No farewell, good Paul—nay, Peter—what 's your name
remembered rightly?
Come, he 's humble: out another would have flounced —
airs
Suitors often give themselves when our sort bow them
forth.
Did I touch his rags? He surely kept his distance:
Yet, there somehow passed to me from him—where'er
the virtue might lie—
Something that inspires my soul—Oh, by assistance
Doubtlessly of Peter!—still, he 's worth just what he 's
worth!

"'T is my own soul soars now: soaring—how? By
crawling!
I 'll to Rome, before Rome's feet the temporal-supreme
lay prostrate!
'Hands' (I 'll say) 'proficient once in pulling, hauling

This and that way men as I was minded—feet now
clasp!'
Ay, the Kaiser's self has wrung them in his fervour!
Now—they only sue to slave for Rome, nor at one doit
the cost rate.
Rome's adopted child—no bone, no muscle, nerve or
Sinew of me but I 'll strain, though out my life I gasp!"

As he stood one evening proudly—(he had traversed
Rome on horseback—peerless pageant!—claimed the
Lateran as new Pope)—
Thinking "All 's attained now! Pontiff! Who could
have erst
Dreamed of my advance so far when, some ten years
ago,
I embraced devotion, grew from priest to bishop,
Gained the Purple, bribed the Conclave, got the Two-
thirds, saw my coop ope,
Came out—what Rome hails me! O were there a wish-
shop,
Not one wish more would I purchase—lord of all below!

"Ha!—who dares intrude now—puts aside the arras?
What, old Peter, here again, at such a time, in such a
presence?
Satan sends this plague back merely to embarrass

Me who enter on my office—little needing you!
'Faith, I 'm touched myself by age, but you look
Tithon!
Were it vain to seek of you the sole prize left—re-
juvenescence?
Well, since flesh is grass which Time must lay his scythe
on,
Say your say and so depart and make no more ado!"

Peter faltered—coughing first by way of prologue—
"Holiness, your help comes late: a death at ninety little
matters.
Padua, build poor Peter's pyre now, on log roll log,
Burn away—I 've lived my day! Yet here 's the sting in
death—
I 've an author's pride: I want my Book's survival:
See, I 've hid it in my breast to warm me mid the rags
and tatters!
Save it—tell next age your Master had no rival!
Scholar's debt discharged in full, be 'Thanks' my latest
breath!"

"Faugh, the frowsy bundle—scribblings harum-scarum
Scattered o'er a dozen sheepskins! What 's the name of
this farrago?
Ha—'*Conciliator Differentiarum*'—

Man and book may burn together, cause the world no loss!

Stop—what else? A tractate—eh, '*De Speciebus Ceremonialis Ma-gi-æ?*' I dream sure! Hence, away, go,

Wizard, quick avoid me! Vain you clasp my knee, buss

Hand that bears the Fisher's ring or foot that boasts the Cross!

"Help! The old magician clings like an octopus!

Ah, you rise now—fuming, fretting, frowning, if I read your features!

Frown, who cares? We 're Pope—once Pope, you can't unpope us!

Good—you muster up a smile: that 's better! Still so brisk?

All at once grown youthful? But the case is plain! Ass—

Here I dally with the fiend, yet know the Word—compels all creatures

Earthly, heavenly, hellish. *Apage, Sathanas*

Dicam verbum Salomonis—" "*—dicite!*" When—whisk!—

What was changed? The stranger gave his eyes a rubbing:

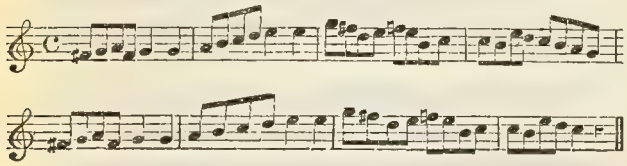
There smiled Peter's face turned back a moment at him
o'er the shoulder,
As the black door shut, bang! "So he 'scapes a
drubbing!"
(Quoth a boy who, unespied, had stopped to hear the
talk).
"That 's the way to thank these wizards when they bid
men
Benedicite! What ails you? You, a man, and yet no
bolder?
Foreign Sir, you look but foolish!" "*Idmen, idmen!*"
Groaned the Greek. "O Peter, cheese at last I know
from chalk!"

Peter lived his life out, menaced yet no martyr,
Knew himself the mighty man he was—such knowledge
all his guerdon,
Left the world a big book—people but in part err
When they style a true *Scientiæ Com-pen-di-um:*
"*Admirationem incutit*" they sourly
Smile, as fast they shut the folio which myself was some-
how spurred on
Once to ope: but love — life's milk which daily,
hourly,
Blockheads lap—O Peter, still thy taste of love 's to
come!

Greek, was your ambition likewise doomed to failure?
True, I find no record you wore purple, walked with axe and fasces,
Played some antipope's part: still, friend, don't turn tail, you 're
Certain, with but these two gifts, to gain earth's prize in time!
Cleverness uncurbed by conscience—if you ransacked
Peter's book you 'd find no potent spell like these to rule the masses;
Nor should want example, had I not to transact
Other business. Go your ways, you 'll thrive! So ends my rhyme.

When these parts Tiberius,—not yet Cæsar,—travelled,
Passing Padua, he consulted Padua's Oracle of Geryon
(God three-headed, thrice wise) just to get unravelled
Certain tangles of his future. "Fling at Abano
Golden dice," it answered: "dropt within the fount there,
Note what sum the pips present!" And still we see each die, the very one,
Turn up, through the crystal,—read the whole account there
Where 't is told by Suetonius,—each its highest throw.

Scarce the sportive fancy-dice I fling show "Venus:"
Still -for love of that dear land which I so oft in dreams
revisit—
I have—oh, not sung! but lilted (as—between us—
Grows my lazy custom) this its legend. What the lilt?



DOCTOR ——

A Rabbi told me: On the day allowed
Satan for carping at God's rule, he came,
Fresh from our earth, to brave the angel-crowd.

"What is the fault now?" "This I find to blame:
Many and various are the tongues below,
Yet all agree in one speech, all proclaim

"'Hell has no might to match what earth can show:
Death is the strongest-born of Hell, and yet
Stronger than Death is a Bad Wife, we know.'

"Is it a wonder if I fume and fret—
Robbed of my rights, since Death am I, and mine
The style of Strongest? Men pay Nature's debt

"Because they must at my demand; decline
To pay it henceforth surely men will please,
Provided husbands with bad wives combine

"To baffle Death. Judge between me and these!"
"Thyself shalt judge. Descend to earth in shape
Of mortal, marry, drain from froth to lees

"The bitter draught, then see if thou escape
Concluding, with men sorrowful and sage,
A Bad Wife's strength Death's self in vain would ape!"

How Satan entered on his pilgrimage,
Conformed himself to earthly ordinance,
Wived and played husband well from youth to age

Intrepidly—I leave untold, advance
Through many a married year until I reach
A day when—of his father's countenance

The very image, like him too in speech
As well as thought and deed,—the union's fruit
Attained maturity. "I needs must teach

"My son a trade: but trade, such son to suit,
Needs seeking after. He a man of war?
Too cowardly! A lawyer wins repute—

"Having to toil and moil, though both which are
Beyond this sluggard. There 's Divinity:
No, that 's my own bread-winner—that be far

"From my poor offspring! Physic? Ha, we 'll try
If this be practicable. Where 's my wit?
Asleep?—since, now I come to think. . . . Ay, ay!

"Hither, my son! Exactly have I hit
On a profession for thee. *Medicus*—
Behold, thou art appointed! Yea, I spit

"Upon thine eyes, bestow a virtue thus
That henceforth not this human form I wear
Shalt thou perceive alone, but—one of us

"By privilege—thy fleshly sight shall bear
Me in my spirit-person as I walk
The world and take my prey appointed there.

"Doctor once dubbed—what ignorance shall baulk
Thy march triumphant? Diagnose the gout
As cholic, and prescribe it cheese for chalk—

"No matter! All 's one: cure shall come about
And win thee wealth—fees paid with such a roar
Of thanks and praise alike from lord and lout

"As never stunned man's ears on earth before.
'How may this be?' Why, that 's my sceptic! Soon
Truth will corrupt thee, soon thou doubt'st no more!

"Why is it I bestow on thee the boon
Of recognizing me the while I go
Invisibly among men, morning, noon

"And night, from house to house, and—quick or slow—
Take my appointed prey? They summon thee
For help, suppose: obey the summons! so!

"Enter, look round! Where's Death? Know—I am he,
Satan who work all evil: I who bring
Pain to the patient in whate'er degree.

"I, then, am there: first glance thine eye shall fling
Will find me—whether distant or at hand,
As I am free to do my spiriting.

"At such mere first glance thou shalt understand
Wherefore I reach no higher up the room
Than door or window, when my form is scanned.

"Howe'er friends' faces please to gather gloom,
Bent o'er the sick,—howe'er himself desponds,—
In such case Death is not the sufferer's doom.

"Contrariwise, do friends rejoice my bonds
Are broken, does the captive in his turn
Crow 'Life shall conquer'? Nip these foolish fronds

"Of hope a-sprout, if haply thou discern
Me at the head—my victim's head, be sure!
Forth now! This taught thee, little else to learn!"

And forth he went. Folk heard him ask demure
"How do you style this ailment? (There he peeps
My father, through the arras!) Sirs, the cure

"Is plain as A. B. C.! Experience steeps
Blossoms of pennyroyal half an hour
In sherris. *Sumat!*—Lo, how sound he sleeps—

"The subject you presumed was past the power
Of Galen to relieve!" Or else "How 's this?
Why call for help so tardily? Clouds lour

"Portentously indeed, Sirs! (Nought 's amiss:
He 's at the bed-foot merely.) Still, the storm
May pass averted—not by quacks, I wis

"Like you, my masters! You, forsooth, perform
A miracle? Stand, sciolists, aside!
Blood, ne'er so cold, at ignorance grows warm!"

Which boasting by result was justified,
Big as might words be: whether drugged or left
Drugless, the patient always lived, not died.

Great the heir's gratitude, so nigh bereft
Of all he prized in this world: sweet the smile
Of disconcerted rivals: "Cure?—say, theft

"From Nature in despite of Art—so style
This off-hand kill-or-cure work! You did much,
I had done more: folk cannot wait awhile!"

But did the case change? was it—"Scarcely such
The symptoms as to warrant our recourse
To your skill, Doctor! Yet since just a touch

"Of pulse, a taste of breath, has all the force
With you of long investigation claimed
By others,—tracks an ailment to its source

"Intuitively,—may we ask unblamed
What from this pimple you prognosticate?"
"Death!" was the answer, as he saw and named

The coucher by the sick man's head. "Too late
You send for my assistance. I am bold
Only by Nature's leave, and bow to Fate!

"Besides, you have my rivals: lavish gold!
How comfortably quick shall life depart
Cosseted by attentions manifold!

"One day, one hour ago, perchance my art
Had done some service. Since you have yourselves
Chosen—before the horse—to put the cart,

"Why, Sirs, the sooner that the sexton delves
Your patient's grave, the better! How you stare
—Shallow, for all the deep books on your shelves!

"Fare you well, fumblers!" Do I need declare
What name and fame, what riches recompensed
The Doctor's practice? Never anywhere

Such an adept as daily evidenced
Each new vaticination! Oh, not he
Like dolts who dallied with their scruples, fenced

With subterfuge, nor gave out frank and free
Something decisive! If he said "I save
The patient," saved he was: if "Death will be

"His portion," you might count him dead. Thus brave,
Behold our worthy, sans competitor
Throughout the country, on the architrave

Of Glory's temple golden-lettered for
Machaon *redivivus*! So, it fell
That, of a sudden, when the Emperor

Was smit by sore disease, I need not tell
If any other Doctor's aid was sought
To come and forthwith make the sick Prince well.

"He will reward thee as a monarch ought.
Not much imports the malady; but then,
He clings to life and cries like one distraught

"For thee—who, from a simple citizen,
Mayst look to rise in rank,—nay, haply wear
A medal with his portrait,—always when

"Recovery is quite accomplished. There!
Pass to the presence!" Hardly has he crossed
The chamber's threshold when he halts, aware

Of who stands sentry by the head. All 's lost.
"Sire, nought avails my art: you near the goal,
And end the race by giving up the ghost."

"How?" cried the monarch: "Names upon your roll
Of half my subjects rescued by your skill—
Old and young, rich and poor—crowd cheek by jowl

"And yet no room for mine? Be saved I will!
Why else am I earth's foremost potentate?
Add me to these and take as fee your fill

"Of gold—that point admits of no debate
Between us: save me, as you can and must,—
Gold, till your gown's pouch cracks beneath the weight!"

This touched the Doctor. "Truly a home-thrust,
Parent, you will not parry! Have I dared
Entreat that you forego the meal of dust

"—Man that is snake's meat—when I saw prepared
Your daily portion? Never! Just this once,
Go from his head, then,—let his life be spared!"

Whisper met whisper in the gruff response
"Fool, I must have my prey: no inch I budge
From where thou see'st me thus myself ensconce."

"Ah," moaned the sufferer, "by thy look I judge
Wealth fails to tempt thee: what if honours prove
More efficacious? Nought to him I grudge

"Who saves me. Only keep my head above
The cloud that 's creeping round it—I 'll divide
My empire with thee! No? What 's left but—love?

"Does love allure thee? Well then, take as bride
My only daughter, fair beyond belief!
Save me—to-morrow shall the knot be tied!"

"Father, you hear him! Respite ne'er so brief
Is all I beg: go now and come again
Next day, for aught I care: respect the grief

"Mine will be if thy first-born sues in vain!"
"Fool, I must have my prey!" was all he got
In answer. But a fancy crossed his brain.

"I have it! Sire, methinks a meteor shot
Just now across the heavens and neutralized
Jove's salutary influence: 'neath the blot

"Plumb are you placed now: well that I surmised
The cause of failure! Knaves, reverse the bed!"
"Stay!" groaned the monarch, "I shall be capsized—

"Jolt—jolt—my heels uplift where late my head
Was lying—sure I 'm turned right round at last!
What do you say now, Doctor?" Nought he said:

For why? With one brisk leap the Antic passed
From couch-foot back to pillow,—as before,
Lord of the situation. Long aghast

The Doctor gazed, then "Yet one trial more
Is left me" inwardly he uttered "Shame
Upon thy flinty heart! Do I implore

"This trifling favour in the idle name
Of mercy to the moribund? I plead
The cause of all thou dost affect: my aim

"Befits my author! Why would I succeed?
Simply that by success I may promote
The growth of thy pet virtues—pride and greed.

"But keep thy favours!—curse thee! I devote
Henceforth my service to the other side.
No time to lose: the rattle 's in his throat.

"So,—not to leave one last resource untried,—
Run to my house with all haste, somebody!
Bring me that knobstick thence, so often plied

"With profit by the astrologer—shall I
Disdain its help, the mystic Jacob's-Staff?
Sire, do but have the courage not to die

"Till this arrive! Let none of you dare laugh!
Though rugged its exterior, I have seen
That implement work wonders, send the chaff

"Quick and thick flying from the wheat—I mean,
By metaphor, a human sheaf it thrashed
Flail-like. Go fetch it! Or—a word between

" Just you and me, friend!—go bid, unabashed,
My mother, whom you 'll find there, bring the stick
Herself—herself, mind!" Out the lackey dashed

Zealous upon the errand. Craft and trick
Are meat and drink to Satan: and he grinned
—How else?—at an excuse so politic

For failure: scarce would Jacob's-Staff rescind
Fate's firm decree! And ever as he neared
The agonizing one, his breath like wind

Froze to the marrow, while his eye-flash seared
Sense in the brain up: closelier and more close
Pressing his prey, when at the door appeared

—Who but his Wife the Bad? Whereof one dose,
One grain, one mite of the medicament,
Sufficed him. Up he sprang. One word, too gross

To soil my lips with,—and through ceiling went
Somehow the Husband. " That a storm 's dispersed
We know for certain by the sulphury scent!

" Hail to the Doctor! Who but one so versed
In all Dame Nature's secrets had prescribed
The staff thus opportunely? Style him first

"And foremost of physicians!" "I 've imbibed
Elixir surely," smiled the prince,—"have gained
New lease of life. Dear Doctor, how you bribed

"Death to forego me, boots not: you 've obtained
My daughter and her dowry. Death, I 've heard,
Was still on earth the strongest power that reigned,

"Except a Bad Wife!" Whereunto demurred
Nowise the Doctor, so refused the fee
—No dowry, no bad wife!

"You think absurd
This tale?"—the Rabbi added: "True, our Talmud
Boasts sundry such: yet—have our elders erred
In thinking there 's some water there, not all mud?"
I tell it, as the Rabbi told it me.

PAN AND LUNA.

Si credere dignum est.—*Georgic.* iii. 390.

O WORTHY of belief I hold it was,
Virgil, your legend in those strange three lines!
No question, that adventure came to pass
One black night in Arcadia: yes, the pines,
Mountains and valleys mingling made one mass
Of black with void black heaven: the earth's confines,
The sky's embrace,—below, above, around,
All hardened into black without a bound.

Fill up a swart stone chalice to the brim
With fresh-squeezed yet fast-thickening poppy-juice:
See how the sluggish jelly, late a-swim,
Turns marble to the touch of who would loose
The solid smooth, grown jet from rim to rim,
By turning round the bowl! So night can fuse
Earth with her all-comprising sky. No less,
Light, the least spark, shows air and emptiness.

And thus it proved when —diving into space,
Stript of all vapour, from each web of mist
Utterly film-free—entered on her race
The naked Moon, full-orbed antagonist
Of night and dark, night's dowry: peak to base,
Upstarted mountains, and each valley, kissed
To sudden life, lay silver-bright: in air
Flew she revealed, Maid-Moon with limbs all bare.

Still as she fled, each depth—where refuge seemed—
Opening a lone pale chamber, left distinct
Those limbs: mid still-retreating blue, she teemed
Herself with whiteness,—virginal, uncinct
By any halo save what finely gleamed
To outline not disguise her: heaven was linked
In one accord with earth to quaff the joy,
Drain beauty to the dregs without alloy.

Whereof she grew aware. What help? When, lo,
A succourable cloud with sleep lay dense:
Some pine-tree-top had caught it sailing slow,
And tethered for a prize: in evidence
Captive lay fleece on fleece of piled-up snow
Drowsily patient: flake-heaped how or whence,
The structure of that succourable cloud,
What matter? Shamed she plunged into its shroud.

Orbed—so the woman-figure poets call
Because of rounds on rounds—that apple-shaped
Head which its hair binds close into a ball
Each side the curving ears—that pure undraped
Pout of the sister paps—that . . . Once for all,
Say—her consummate circle thus escaped
With its innumerous circlets, sank absorbed,
Safe in the cloud—O naked Moon full-orbed!

But what means this? The downy swathes combine,
Conglobe, the smothery coy-caressing stuff
Curdles about her! Vain each twist and twine
Those lithe limbs try, encroached on by a fluff
Fitting as close as fits the dented spine
Its flexile ivory outside-flesh: enough!
The plumy drifts contract, condense, constringe,
Till she is swallowed by the feathery springe.

As when a pearl slips lost in the thin foam
Churned on a sea-shore, and, o'er-frothed, conceits
Herself safe-housed in Amphitrite's dome,—
If, through the bladdery wave-worked yeast, she meets
What most she loathes and leaps from,—elf from gnome
No gladlier,—finds that safest of retreats
Bubble about a treacherous hand wide ope
To grasp her—(divers who pick pearls so grope)—

So lay this Maid-Moon clasped around and caught
By rough red Pan, the god of all that tract:
He it was schemed the snare thus subtly wrought
With simulated earth-breath,—wool-tufts packed
Into a billowy wrappage. Sheep far-sought
For spotless shearings yield such: take the fact
As learned Virgil gives it,—how the breed
Whitens itself for ever: yes, indeed!

If one forefather ram, though pure as chalk
From tinge on fleece, should still display a tongue
Black 'neath the beast's moist palate, prompt men baulk
The propagating plague: he gets no young:
They rather slay him,—sell his hide to caulk
Ships with, first steeped in pitch,—nor hands are wrung
In sorrow for his fate: protected thus,
The purity we love is gained for us.

So did Girl-moon, by just her attribute
Of unmatched modesty betrayed, lie trapped,
Bruised to the breast of Pan, half-god half-brute,
Raked by his bristly boar-sward while he lapped
—Never say, kissed her! that were to pollute
Love's language—which moreover proves unapt

To tell how she recoiled—as who finds thorns
Where she sought flowers—when, feeling, she touched
—horns!

Then—does the legend say?—first moon-eclipse
Happened, first swooning-fit which puzzled sore
The early sages? Is that why she dips
Into the dark, a minute and no more,
Only so long as serves her while she rips
The cloud's womb through and, faultless as before,
Pursues her way? No lesson for a maid
Left she, a maid herself thus trapped, betrayed?

Ha, Virgil? Tell the rest, you! "To the deep
Of his domain the wildwood, Pan forthwith
Called her, and so she followed"—in her sleep,
Surely?—"by no means spurning him." The myth
Explain who may! Let all else go, I keep
—As of a ruin just a monolith—
Thus much, one verse of five words, each a boon:
Arcadia, night, a cloud, Pan, and the moon.

"Touch him ne'er so lightly, into song he broke:
Soil so quick-receptive,—not one feather-seed,
Not one flower-dust fell but straight its fall awoke
Vitalizing virtue: song would song succeed
Sudden as spontaneous—prove a poet-soul!"

Indeed?

Rock 's the song-soil rather, surface hard and bare:
Sun and dew their mildness, storm and frost their rage
Vainly both expend,—few flowers awaken there:
Quiet in its cleft broods—what the after age
Knows and names a pine, a nation's heritage.

JOCOSERIA.

WANTING is—what?
Summer redundant,
Blueness abundant,
—Where is the blot?
Beamy the world, yet a blank all the same,
—Framework which waits for a picture to frame:
What of the leafage, what of the flower?
Roses embowering with nought they embower!
Come then, complete incompletion, O comer,
Pant through the blueness, perfect the summer!
Breathe but one breath
Rose-beauty above,
And all that was death
Grows life, grows love,
Grows love!

JOCOSERIA.

1883.

DONALD.

"WILL you hear my story also,
—Huge Sport, brave adventure in plenty?"
The boys were a band from Oxford,
The oldest of whom was twenty.

The bothy we held carouse in
Was bright with fire and candle;
Tale followed tale like a merry-go-round
Whereof Sport turned the handle.

In our eyes and noses—turf-smoke:
In our ears a tune from the trivet,
Whence "Boiling, boiling," the kettle sang,
"And ready for fresh Glenlivet."

So, feat capped feat, with a vengeance:
Truths, though,—the lads were loyal:
"Grouse, five score brace to the bag!
Deer, ten hours' stalk of the Royal!"

Of boasting, not one bit, boys!
Only there seemed to settle
Somehow above your curly heads,
—Plain through the singing kettle,

Palpable through the cloud,
As each new-puffed Havanna
Rewarded the teller's well-told tale,—
This vaunt "To Sport—Hosanna!

"Hunt, fish, shoot,
Would a man fulfil life's duty!
Not to the bodily frame alone
Does Sport give strength and beauty,

"But character gains in—courage?
Ay, Sir, and much beside it!
You don't sport, more 's the pity:
You soon would find, if you tried it,

"Good sportsman means good fellow,
Sound-hearted he, to the centre;
Your mealy-mouthed mild milksops
—There's where the rot can enter!

"There's where the dirt will breed,
The shabbiness Sport would banish!
Oh no, Sir, no! In your honoured case
All such objections vanish.

"'T is known how hard you studied:
A Double-First—what, the jigger!
Give me but half your Latin and Greek,
I'll never again touch trigger!

"Still, tastes are tastes, allow me!
Allow, too, where there 's keenness
For Sport, there 's little likelihood
Of a man's displaying meanness!"

So, put on my mettle, I interposed.
"Will you hear my story?" quoth I.
"Never mind how long since it happed,
I sat, as we sit, in a bothy;

"With as merry a band of mates, too,
Undergrads all on a level:
(One's a Bishop, one's gone to the Bench,
And one's gone—well, to the Devil.)

"When, lo, a scratching and tapping!
In hobbled a ghastly visitor.
Listen to just what he told us himself
—No need of our playing inquisitor!"

Do you happen to know in Ross-shire
Mount . . . Ben . . . but the name scarce matters:
Of the naked fact I am sure enough,
Though I clothe it in rags and tatters.

You may recognise Ben by description;
Behind him—a moor's immenseness:
Up goes the middle mount of a range,
Fringed with its firs in denseness.

Rimming the edge, its fir-fringe, mind!
For an edge there is, though narrow;
From end to end of the range, a stripe
Of path runs straight as an arrow.

And the mountaineer who takes that path
Saves himself miles of journey
He has to plod if he crosses the moor
Through heather, peat and burnie.

But a mountaineer he needs must be,
For, look you, right in the middle
Projects bluff Ben—with an end in *ich*—
Why planted there, is a riddle:

Since all Ben's brothers little and big
Keep rank, set shoulder to shoulder,
And only this burliest out must bulge
Till it seems—to the beholder

From down in the gully,—as if Ben's breast
To a sudden spike diminished,
Would signify to the boldest foot
"All further passage finished!"

Yet the mountaineer who sidles on
And on to the very bending,
Discovers, if heart and brain be proof,
No necessary ending.

Foot up, foot down, to the turn abrupt
Having trod, he, there arriving,
Finds—what he took for a point was breadth,
A mercy of Nature's contriving.

So, he rounds what, when 't is reached, proves straight,
From one side gains the other.
The wee path widens—resume the march,
And he foils you, Ben my brother!

But Donald—(that name, I hope, will do)—
I wrong him if I call "foiling"
The tramp of the callant, whistling the while
As blithe as our kettle 's boiling.

He had dared the danger from boyhood up,
And now,—when perchance was waiting
A lass at the brig below,—'twixt mount
And moor would he stand debating?

Moreover this Donald was twenty-five,
A glory of bone and muscle:
Did a fiend dispute the right of way,
Donald would try a tussle.

Lightsomely marched he out of the broad
On to the narrow and narrow;
A step more, rounding the angular rock,
Reached the front straight as an arrow.

He stepped it, safe on the ledge he stood,
When—whom found he full-facing?
What fellow in courage and wariness too,
Had scouted ignoble pacing,

And left low safety to timid mates,
And made for the dread dear danger,
And gained the height where—who could guess
He would meet with a rival ranger?

'T was a gold-red stag that stood and stared,
Gigantic and magnific,
By the wonder—ay, and the peril—struck
Intelligent and pacific:

For a red deer is no fallow deer
Grown cowardly through park-feeding;
He batters you like a thunderbolt
If you brave his haunts unheeding.

I doubt he could hardly perform *volte-face*
Had valour advised discretion:
You may walk on a rope, but to turn on a rope
No Blondin makes profession.

Yet Donald must turn, would pride permit,
Though pride ill brooks retiring:
Each eyed each—mute man, motionless beast—
Less fearing than admiring.

These are the moments when quite new sense,
To meet some need as novel,
Springs up in the brain: it inspired resource:
—"Nor advance nor retreat but—grovel!"

And slowly, surely, never a whit
Relaxing the steady tension
Of eye-stare which binds man to beast,—
By an inch and inch declension,

Sank Donald sidewise down and down :
Till flat, breast upwards, lying
At his six-foot length, no corpse more still,
—" If he cross me ! The trick 's worth trying."

Minutes were an eternity ;
But a new sense was created
In the stag's brain too ; he resolves ! Slow, sure,
With eye-stare unabated,

Feelingly he extends a foot
Which tastes the way ere it touches
Earth's solid and just escapes man's soft,
Nor hold of the same unclutches

Till its fellow foot, light as a feather whisk,
Lands itself no less finely :
So a mother removes a fly from the face
Of her babe asleep supinely.

And now 't is the haunch and hind foot's turn
—That 's hard : can the beast quite raise it ?
Yes, traversing half the prostrate length,
His hoof-tip does not graze it.

Just one more lift! But Donald, you see,
Was sportsman first, man after:
A fancy lightened his caution through,
—He well-nigh broke into laughter.

"It were nothing short of a miracle!
Unrivalled, unexampled—
All sporting feats with this feat matched
Were down and dead and trampled!"

The last of the legs as tenderly
Follows the rest: or never
Or now is the time! His knife in reach,
And his right-hand loose—how clever!

For this can stab up the stomach's soft,
While the left-hand grasps the pastern.
A rise on the elbow, and—now 's the time
Or never: this turn 's the last turn!

I shall dare to place myself by God
Who scanned—for He does—each feature
Of the face thrown up in appeal to Him
By the agonizing creature.

Nay, I hear plain words: "Thy gift brings this!"
Up he sprang, back he staggered,
Over he fell, and with him our friend
—At following game no laggard.

Yet he was not dead when they picked next day
From the gully's depth the wreck of him;
His fall had been stayed by the stag beneath
Who cushioned and saved the neck of him

But the rest of his body—why, doctors said,
Whatever could break was broken;
Legs, arms, ribs, all of him looked like a toast
In a tumbler of port-wine soaken.

"That your life is left you, thank the stag!"
Said they when—the slow cure ended—
They opened the hospital door, and thence
—Strapped, spliced, main fractures mended,

And minor damage left wisely alone,—
Like an old shoe clouted and cobbled,
Out—what went in a Goliath well-nigh,—
Some half of a David hobbled.

"You must ask an alms from house to house:
Sell the stag's head for a bracket,
With its grand twelve tines—I 'd buy it myself—
And use the skin for a jacket!"

He was wiser, made both head and hide
His win-penny: hands and knees on,
Would manage to crawl—poor crab—by the roads
In the misty stalking-season.

And if he discovered a bothy like this,
Why, harvest was sure: folk listened.
He told his tale to the lovers of Sport:
Lips twitched, cheeks glowed, eyes glistened.

And when he had come to the close, and spread
His spoils for the gazers' wonder,
With "Gentlemen, here 's the skull of the stag
I was over, thank God, not under!"—

The company broke out in applause;
"By Jingo, a lucky cripple!
Have a munch of grouse and a hunk of bread,
And a tug, besides, at our tipple!"

And "There 's my pay for your pluck!" cried This,
"And mine for your jolly story!"
Cried That, while 'T other—but he was drunk—
Hiccupped "A trump, a Tory!"

I hope I gave twice as much as the rest;
For, as Homer would say, "within grate
Though teeth kept tongue," my whole soul growled
"Rightly rewarded,—Ingrate!"

SOLOMON AND BALKIS.

SOLOMON King of the Jews and the Queen of Sheba Balkis
Talk on the ivory throne, and we well may conjecture their talk is
Solely of things sublime: why else has she sought Mount Zion,
Climbed the six golden steps, and sat betwixt lion and lion?

She proves him with hard questions: before she has reached the middle
He smiling supplies the end, straight solves them riddle by riddle;
Until, dead-beaten at last, there is left no spirit in her,
And thus would she close the game whereof she was first beginner:

" O wisest thou of the wise, world's marvel and well-nigh monster,
One crabbed question more to construe or *vulgo* conster!
Who are those, of all mankind, a monarch of perfect wisdom
Should open to, when they knock at *spheteron do*—that 's his dome?"

The King makes tart reply: "Whom else but the wise his equals
Should he welcome with heart and voice?—since, king though he be, such weak walls
Of circumstance—power and pomp—divide souls each from other
That whoso proves kingly in craft I needs must acknowledge my brother.

"Come poet, come painter, come sculptor, come builder —whate'er his condition,
Is he prime in his art? We are peers! My insight has pierced the partition
And hails—for the poem, the picture, the statue, the building—my fellow!
Gold 's gold though dim in the dust: court-polish soon turns it yellow.

"But tell me in turn, O thou to thy weakling sex superior,
That for knowledge hast travelled so far yet seemest no whit the wearier,—
Who are those, of all mankind, a queen like thyself, consummate
In wisdom, should call to her side with an affable 'Up hither, come, mate!'"

"The Good are my mates—how else? Why doubt it?" the Queen upbridled:
"Sure even above the Wise,—or in travel my eyes have idled,—
I see the Good stand plain: be they rich, poor, shrewd or simple,
If Good they only are. . . . Permit me to drop my wimple!"

And in that bashful jerk of her body, she—peace, thou scoffer!—
Jostled the King's right-hand stretched courteously help to proffer,
And so disclosed a portent: all unaware the Prince eyed
The Ring which bore the Name—turned outside now from inside!

The truth-compelling Name!—and at once "I greet the Wise—Oh,
Certainly welcome such to my court—with this proviso:
The building must be my temple, my person stand forth the statue,
The picture my portrait prove, and the poem my praise—you cat, you!"

But Solomon nonplussed? Nay! "Be truthful in turn!" so bade he:
"See the Name, obey its hest!" And at once subjoins the lady
—"Provided the Good are the young, men strong and tall and proper,
Such servants I straightway enlist,—which means . . ." but the blushes stop her.

"Ah, Soul," the Monarch sighed, "that wouldst soar yet ever crawlest,
How comes it thou canst discern the greatest yet choose the smallest,
Unless because heaven is far, where wings find fit expansion,
While creeping on all-fours suits, suffices the earthly mansion?

"Aspire to the Best! But which? There are Bests and Bests so many,
With a *habitat* each for each, earth's Best as much Best as any!
On Lebanon roots the cedar—soil lofty, yet stony and sandy—
While hyssop, of worth in its way, on the wall grows low but handy.

"Above may the Soul spread wing, spurn body and sense beneath her;
Below she must condescend to plodding unbuoyed by æther.
In heaven I yearn for knowledge, account all else inanity;
On earth I confess an itch for the praise of fools—that's Vanity.

"It is nought, it will go, it can never presume above to trouble me;
But here,—why, it toys and tickles and teases, howe'er I redouble me
In a doggedest of endeavours to play the indifferent. Therefore,
Suppose we resume discourse? Thou hast travelled thus far: but wherefore?

"Solely for Solomon's sake, to see whom earth styles
Sagest?"
Through her blushes laughed the Queen. "For the
sake of a Sage? The gay jest!
On high, be communion with Mind—there, Body concerns
not Balkis:
Down here,—do I make too bold? Sage Solomon,—
one fool's small kiss!"

CRISTINA AND MONALDESCHI.

Ah, but how each loved each, Marquis!
Here's the gallery they trod
Both together, he her god,
She his idol,—lend your rod,
Chamberlain!—ay, there they are—"*Quis Separabit?*"—plain those two
Touching words come into view,
Apposite for me and you:

Since they witness to incessant
Love like ours: King Francis, he—
Diane the adored one, she—
Prototypes of you and me.
Everywhere is carved her Crescent
With his Salamander-sign—
Flame-fed creature: flame benign
To itself or, if malign,

Only to the meddling curious,
—So, be warned, Sir! Where's my head?
How it wanders! What I said
Merely meant—the creature, fed
Thus on flame, was scarce injurious
Save to fools who woke its ire,
Thinking fit to play with fire.
'Tis the Crescent you admire?

Then, be Diane! I 'll be Francis.
Crescents change,—true!—wax and wane,
Woman-like: male hearts retain
Heat nor, once warm, cool again.
So, we figure—such our chance is—
I as man and you as . . . What?
Take offence? My Love forgot
He plays woman, I do not?

I—the woman? See my habit,
Ask my people! Anyhow,
Be we what we may, one vow
Binds us, male or female. Now,—
Stand, Sir! Read! "*Quis separabit?*"
Half a mile of pictured way
Past these palace-walls to-day
Traversed, this I came to say.

You must needs begin to love me;
First I hated, then, at best,
—Have it so!—I acquiesced;
Pure compassion did the rest.
From below thus raised above me,
Would you, step by step, descend,
Pity me, become my friend,
Like me, like less, loathe at end?

That 's the ladder's round you rose by!
That—my own foot kicked away,
Having raised you: let it stay,
Serve you for retreating? Nay.
Close to me you climbed: as close by,
Keep your station, though the peak
Reached proves somewhat bare and bleak
Woman 's strong if man is weak.

Keep here, loving me forever!
Love's look, gesture, speech, I claim;
Act love, lie love, all the same—
Play as earnest were our game!
Lonely I stood long: 't was clever
When you climbed, before men's eyes,
Spurned the earth and scaled the skies,
Gained my peak and grasped your prize.

Here you stood, then, to men's wonder.
Here you tire of standing? Kneel!
Cure what giddiness you feel,
This way! Do your senses reel?
Not unlikely! What rolls under?
Yawning death in yon abyss
Where the waters whirl and hiss
Round more frightful peaks than this.

Should my buffet dash you thither . . .
But be sage! No watery grave
Needs await you: seeming brave
Kneel on safe, dear timid slave!
You surmised, when you climbed hither,
Just as easy were retreat
Should you tire, conceive unmeet
Longer patience at my feet?

Me as standing, you as stooping,—
Who arranged for each the pose?
Lest men think us friends turned foes.
Keep the attitude you chose!
Men are used to this same grouping—
I and you like statues seen.
You and I, no third between,
Kneel and stand! That makes the scene.

Mar it—and one buffet . . . Pardon!
Needless warmth—wise words in waste!
'T was prostration that replaced
Kneeling, then? A proof of taste.
Crouch, not kneel, while I mount guard on
Prostrate love—become no waif,
No estray to waves that chafe
Disappointed—love 's so safe!

Waves that chafe? The idlest fancy!
Peaks that scare? I think we know
Walls enclose our sculpture: so
Grouped, we pose in Fontainebleau.
Up now! Wherefore hesitancy?
Arm in arm and cheek by cheek,
Laugh with me at waves and peak!
Silent still? Why, pictures speak.

See, where Juno strikes Ixion,
Primatice speaks plainly! Pooh—
Rather, Florentine Le Roux!
I 've lost head for who is who—
So it swims and wanders! Fie on
What still proves me female! Here,
By the staircase!—for we near
That dark "Gallery of the Deer."

Look me in the eyes once! Steady!
Are you faithful now as erst
On that eve when we two first
Vowed at Avon, blessed and cursed
Faith and falsehood? Pale already?
Forward! Must my hand compel
Entrance—this way? Exit—well,
Somehow, somewhere. Who can tell?

What if to the self-same place in
Rustic Avon, at the door
Of the village church once more,
Where a tombstone paves the floor
By that holy-water basin
You appealed to—"As, below,
This stone hides its corpse, e'en so
I your secrets hide"? What ho!

Friends, my four! You, Priest, confess him!
I have judged the culprit there:
Execute my sentence! Care
For no mail such cowards wear!
Done, Priest? Then, absolve and bless him!
Now—you three, stab thick and fast,
Deep and deeper! Dead at last?
Thanks, friends—Father, thanks! Aghast?

What one word of his confession
Would you tell me, though I lured
With that royal crown abjured
Just because its bars immured
Love too much? Love burst compression,
Fled free, finally confessed
All its secrets to that breast
Whence . . . let Avon tell the rest!

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT AND FUSELI.

Oh but is it not hard, Dear?
Mine are the nerves to quake at a mouse:
If a spider drops I shrink with fear:
I should die outright in a haunted house;
While for you—did the danger dared bring help—
From a lion's den I could steal his whelp,
With a serpent round me, stand stock-still,
Go sleep in a churchyard,—so would will
Give me the power to dare and do
Valiantly—just for you!

Much amiss in the head, Dear,
I toil at a language, tax my brain
Attempting to draw—the scratches here!
I play, play, practise and all in vain:
But for you—if my triumph brought you pride,
I would grapple with Greek Plays till I died,

Paint a portrait of you—who can tell?
Work my fingers off for your "Pretty well:"
Language and painting and music too,
Easily done—for you!

Strong and fierce in the heart, Dear,
With—more than a will—what seems a power
To pounce on my prey, love outbroke here
In flame devouring and to devour.
Such love has laboured its best and worst
To win me a lover; yet, last as first,
I have not quickened his pulse one beat,
Fixed a moment's fancy, bitter or sweet:
Yet the strong fierce heart's love's labour's due,
Utterly lost, was—you!

ADAM, LILITH, AND EVE.

One day it thundered and lightened.
Two women, fairly frightened,
Sank to their knees, transformed, transfixed,
At the feet of the man who sat betwixt;
And "Mercy!" cried each—"if I tell the truth
Of a passage in my youth!"

Said This: "Do you mind the morning
I met your love with scorning?
As the worst of the venom left my lips,
I thought 'If, despite this lie, he strips
The mask from my soul with a kiss—I crawl
His slave,—soul, body and all!'"

Said That: "We stood to be married;
The priest, or someone, tarried;
'If Paradise-door prove locked?' smiled you.
I thought, as I nodded, smiling too,
'Did one, that 's away, arrive—nor late
Nor soon should unlock Hell's gate!'

It ceased to lighten and thunder.
Up started both in wonder,
Looked round and saw that the sky was clear,
Then laughed "Confess you believed us, Dear!"
"I saw through the joke!" the man replied
They re-seated themselves beside.

IXION.

HIGH in the dome, suspended, of Hell, sad triumph, behold us!
Here the revenge of a God, there the amends of a Man.
Whirling forever in torment, flesh once mortal, immortal
Made—for a purpose of hate—able to die and revive,
Pays to the uttermost pang, then, newly for payment replenished,
Doles out—old yet young—agonies ever afresh;
Whence the result above me: torment is bridged by a rainbow,—
Tears, sweat, blood,—each spasm, ghastly once, glorified now.
Wrung, by the rush of the wheel ordained my place of reposing,
Off in a sparklike spray,—flesh become vapour thro' pain,—

Flies the bestowment of Zeus, soul's vaunted bodily vesture,
Made that his feats observed gain the approval of Man,—
Flesh that he fashioned with sense of the earth and the sky and the ocean,
Framed should pierce to the star, fitted to pore on the plant,—
All, for a purpose of hate, re-framed, re-fashioned, re-fitted
Till, consummate at length,—lo, the employment of sense!
Pain 's mere minister now to the soul, once pledged to her pleasure—
Soul, if untrammelled by flesh, unapprehensive of pain!
Body, professed soul's slave, which serving beguiled and betrayed her,
Made things false seem true, cheated thro' eye and thro' ear,
Lured thus heart and brain to believe in the lying reported,—
Spurn but the traitorous slave, uttermost atom, away,
What should obstruct soul's rush on the real, the only apparent?

Say I have erred,—how else? Was I Ixion or Zeus?
Foiled by my senses I dreamed; I doubtless awaken in wonder:
This proves shine, that—shade? Good was the evil that seemed?
Shall I, with sight thus gained, by torture be taught I was blind once?
Sisuphos, teaches thy stone—Tantalos, teaches thy thirst
Aught which unaided sense, purged pure, less plainly demonstrates?
No, for the past was dream: now that the dreamers awake,
Sisuphos scouts low fraud, and to Tantalos treason is folly.
Ask of myself, whose form melts on the murderous wheel,
What is the sin which throe and throe prove sin to the sinner!
Say the false charge was true,—thus do I expiate, say,
Arrogant thought, word, deed,—mere man who conceited me godlike,
Sat beside Zeus, my friend—knelt before Heré, my love!

What were the need but of pitying power to touch and disperse it,
Film-work—eye's and ear's—all the distraction of sense?
How should the soul not see, not hear,—perceive and as plainly
Render, in thought, word, deed, back again truth—not a lie?
"Ay, but the pain is to punish thee!" Zeus, once more for a pastime,
Play the familiar, the frank! Speak and have speech in return!
I was of Thessaly king, there ruled and a people obeyed me:
Mine to establish the law, theirs to obey it or die:
Wherefore? Because of the good to the people, because of the honour
Thence accruing to me, king, the king's law was supreme.
What of the weakling, the ignorant criminal? Not who, excuseless,
Breaking my law braved death, knowing his deed and its due—
Nay, but the feeble and foolish, the poor transgressor, of purpose
No whit more than a tree, born to erectness of bole,

Palm or plane or pine, we laud if lofty, columnar—
Loathe if athwart, askew,—leave to the axe and the flame!
Where is the vision may penetrate earth and beholding acknowledge
Just one pebble at root ruined the straightness of stem?
Whose fine vigilance follows the sapling, accounts for the failure,
—Here blew wind, so it bent: there the snow lodged, so it broke?
Also the tooth of the beast, bird's bill, mere bite of the insect
Gnawed, gnarled, warped their worst: passive it lay to offence.
King—I was man, no more: what I recognized fau'ty I punished,
Laying it prone: be sure, more than a man had I proved,
Watch and ward o'er the sapling at birthtime had saved it, nor simply
Owned the distortion's excuse,—hindered it wholly: nay, more—
Even a man, as I sat in my place to do judgment, and pallid
Criminals passing to doom shuddered away at my foot,

Could I have probed thro' the face to the heart, read plain a repentance,
Crime confessed fools' play, virtue ascribed to the wise,
Had I not stayed the consignment to doom, not dealt the renewed ones
Life to retraverse the past, light to retrieve the misdeed?
Thus had I done, and thus to have done much more it behoves thee,
Zeus who madest man—flawless or faulty, thy work!
What if the charge were true, as thou mouthest,—Ixion the cherished
Minion of Zeus grew vain, vied with the godships and fell,
Forfeit thro' arrogance? Stranger! I clothed, with the grace of our human,
Inhumanity—gods, natures I likened to ours.
Man among men I had borne me till gods forsooth must regard me
—Nay, must approve, applaud, claim as a comrade at last.
Summoned to enter their circle, I sat—their equal, how other?
Love should be absolute love, faith is in fulness or nought.

"I am thy friend, be mine!" smiled Zeus: "If Heré attract thee,"
Blushed the imperial cheek, "then—as thy heart may suggest!"
Faith in me sprang to the faith, my love hailed love as its fellow,
"Zeus, we are friends—how fast! Heré, my heart for thy heart!"
Then broke smile into fury of frown, and the thunder of "Hence, fool!"
Then thro' the kiss laughed scorn "Limbs or a cloud was to clasp?"
Then from Olumpos to Erebos, then from the rapture to torment,
Then from the fellow of gods—misery's mate, to the man!
—Man henceforth and forever, who lent from the glow of his nature
Warmth to the cold, with light coloured the black and the blank.
So did a man conceive of your passion, you passion-protesters!
So did he trust, so love—being the truth of your lie!
You to aspire to be Man! Man made you who vainly would ape him:
You are the hollowness, he—filling you, falsifies void.

Even as—witness the emblem, Hell's sad triumph suspended,
Born of my tears, sweat, blood—bursting to vapour above—
Arching my torment, an iris ghostlike startles the darkness,
Cold white—jewelry quenched—justifies, glorifies pain.
Strive, mankind, though strife endure through endless obstruction,
Stage after stage, each rise marred by as certain a fall!
Baffled forever—yet never so baffled but, e'en in the baffling,
When Man's strength proves weak, checked in the body or soul—
Whatsoever the medium, flesh or essence,—Ixion 's
Made for a purpose of hate,—clothing the entity Thou,
—Medium whence that entity strives for the Not-Thou beyond it,
Fire elemental, free, frame unencumbered, the All,—
Never so baffled but—when, on the verge of an alien existence,
Heartened to press, by pangs burst to the infinite Pure,
Nothing is reached but the ancient weakness still that arrests strength,

Circumambient still, still the poor human array,
Pride and revenge and hate and cruelty—all it has burst through,
Thought to escape,—fresh formed, found in the fashion it fled,—
Never so baffled but—when Man pays the price of endeavour,
Thunderstruck, downthrust, Tartaros-doomed to the wheel,—
Then, ay, then, from the tears and sweat and blood of his torment,
E'en from the triumph of Hell, up let him look and rejoice!
What is the influence, high o'er Hell, that turns to a rapture
Pain—and despair's murk mists blends in a rainbow of hope?
What is beyond the obstruction, stage by stage tho' it baffle?
Back must I fall, confess "Ever the weakness I fled"?
No, for beyond, far, far is a Purity all-unobstructed!
Zeus was Zeus—not Man: wrecked by his weakness, I whirl.
Out of the wreck I rise—past Zeus to the Potency o'er him!

I—to have hailed him my friend! I—to have clasped
her—my love!
Pallid birth of my pain,—where light, where light is,
aspiring
Thither I rise, whilst thou—Zeus, keep the godship
and sink!

JOCHANAN HAKKADOSH.

"THIS now, this other story makes amends
And justifies our Mishna," quoth the Jew
Aforesaid. "Tell it, learnedest of friends!"

A certain morn broke beautiful and blue
O'er Schiphaz city, bringing joy and mirth,
—So had ye deemed; while the reverse was true,

Since one small house there gave a sorrow birth
In such black sort that, to each faithful eye,
Midnight, not morning settled on the earth.

How else, when it grew certain thou wouldst die
Our much-enlightened master, Israel's prop,
Eximious Jochanan Ben Sabbathai?

Old, yea but, undiminished of a drop,
The vital essence pulsed through heart and brain;
Time left unsickled yet the plenteous crop

On poll and chin and cheek, whereof a skein
Handmaids might weave—hairs silk-soft, silver-white,
Such as the wool-plant's; none the less in vain

Had Physic striven her best against the spite
Of fell disease: the Rabbi must succumb;
And, round the couch whereon in piteous plight

He lay a-dying, scholars,—awe-struck, dumb
Throughout the night-watch,—roused themselves and spoke
One to the other: "Ere death's touch benumb

"His active sense,—while yet 'neath Reason's yoke
Obedient toils his tongue,—befits we claim
The fruit of long experience, bid this oak

"Shed us an acorn which may, all the same,
Grow to a temple-pillar,—dear that day!—
When Israel's scattered seed finds place and name

"Among the envious nations. Lamp us, pray,
Thou the Enlightener! Partest hence in peace?
Hailest without regret—much less, dismay—

"The hour of thine approximate release
From fleshly bondage soul hath found obstruct?
Calmly envisagest the sure increase

"Of knowledge? Eden's tree must hold unplucked
Some apple, sure, has never tried thy tooth,
Juicy with sapience thou hast sought, not sucked?

"Say, does age acquiesce in vanished youth?
Still towers thy purity above—as erst—
Our pleasant follies? Be thy last word—truth!"

The Rabbi groaned; then, grimly, "Last as first
The truth speak I—in boyhood who began
Striving to live an angel, and, amerced

"For such presumption, die now hardly man.
What have I proved of life? To live, indeed,
That much I learned: but here lies Jochanan

"More luckless than stood David when, to speed
His fighting with the Philistine, they brought
Saul's harness forth: whereat, 'Alack, I need

"'Armour to arm me, but have never fought
With sword and spear, nor tried to manage shield,
Proving arms' use, as well trained warrior ought.

"'Only a sling and pebbles can I wield!'
So he: while I, contrariwise, 'No trick
Of weapon helpful on the battle-field

"'Comes unfamiliar to my theoric:
But, bid me put in practice what I know,
Give me a sword—it stings like Moses' stick,

"'A serpent I let drop apace.' E'en so,
I,—able to comport me at each stage
Of human life as never here below

"Man played his part,—since mine the heritage
Of wisdom carried to that perfect pitch,
Ye rightly praise,—I, therefore, who, thus sage,

"Could sure act man triumphantly, enrich
Life's annals with example how I played
Lover, Bard, Soldier, Statist,—(all of which

"Parts in presentment failing, cries invade
The world's ear—'Ah, the Past, the pearl-gift thrown
To hogs, time's opportunity we made

"'So light of, only recognized when flown!
Had we been wise!')—in fine, I—wise enough,—
What profit brings me wisdom never shown

"Just when its showing would from each rebuff
Shelter weak virtue, threaten back to bounds
Encroaching vice, tread smooth each track too rough

"For youth's unsteady footstep, climb the rounds
Of life's long ladder, one by slippery one,
Yet make no stumble? Me hard fate confounds

"With that same crowd of wailers I outrun
By promising to teach another cry
Of more hilarious mood than theirs, the sun

" I look my last at is insulted by.
What cry,—ye ask? Give ear on every side!
Witness yon Lover! 'How entrapped am I!

"'Methought, because a virgin's rose-lip vied
With ripe Khubbezleh's, needs must beauty mate
With meekness and discretion in a bride:

"'Bride she became to me who wail—too late—
Unwise I loved!' That 's one cry. 'Mind 's my gift
I might have loaded me with lore, full weight

"'Pressed down and running over at each rift
O' the brain-bag where the famished clung and fed.
I filled it with what rubbish!—would not sift

"'The wheat from chaff, sound grain from musty—shed
Poison abroad as oft as nutriment—
And sighing say but as my fellows said,

"'*Unwise I learned!*' That 's two. 'In dwarf s-play
spent
Was giant's prowess: warrior all unversed
In war's right waging, I struck brand, was lent

"'For steel's fit service, on mere stone—and cursed
Alike the shocked limb and the shivered steel,
Seeing too late the blade's true use which erst

"'How was I blind to! My cry swells the peal—
Unwise I fought!' That 's three. But wherefore
waste
Breath on the wailings longer? Why reveal

"A root of bitterness whereof the taste
Is noisome to Humanity at large?
First we get Power, but Power absurdly placed

"In Folly's keeping, who resigns her charge
To Wisdom when all Power grows nothing worth:
Bones marrowless are mocked with helm and targe

"When, like your Master's, soon below the earth
With worms shall warfare only be. Farewell,
Children! I die a failure since my birth!"

"Not so!" arose a protest as, pell-mell,
They pattered from his chamber to the street,
Bent on a last resource. Our Targums tell

That such resource there is. Put case, there meet
The Nine Points of Perfection—rarest chance—
Within some saintly teacher whom the fleet

Years, in their blind implacable advance,
O'ertake before fit teaching born of these
Have magnified his scholars' countenance,—

If haply folk compassionating please
To render up—according to his store,
Each one—a portion of the life he sees

Hardly worth saving when 't is set before
Earth's benefit should the Saint, Hakkadosh,
Favoured thereby, attain to full fourscore—

If such contribute (Scoffer, spare thy "Bosh!")
A year, a month, a day, an hour—to eke
Life out,—in him away the gift shall wash

That much of ill-spent time recorded, streak
The twilight of the so-assisted sage
With a new sunrise: truth, though strange to speak!

Quick to the doorway, then, where youth and age,
All Israel, thronging, waited for the last
News of the loved one. "'T is the final stage:

'Art's utmost done, the Rabbi's feet tread fast
The way of all flesh!" So announced that apt
Olive-branch Tsaddik: "Yet, O Brethren, cast

"No eye to earthward! Look where heaven has clapped
Morning's extinguisher—yon ray-shot robe
Of sun-threads—on the constellation mapped

"And mentioned by our Elders,—yea, from Job
Down to Satam,—as figuring forth—what?
Perpend a mystery! Ye call it *Dob*—

"'The Bear': I trow, a wiser name than that
Were *Aish*—'The Bier': a corpse those four stars hold,
Which—are not those Three Daughters weeping at,

"*Banoth*? I judge so: list while I unfold
The reason. As in twice twelve hours this Bier
Goes and returns, about the East-cone rolled,

"So may a setting luminary here
Be rescued from extinction, rolled anew
Upon its track of labour, strong and clear,

"About the Pole—that Salem, every Jew
Helps to build up when thus he saves some Saint
Ordained its architect. Ye grasp the clue

"To all ye seek? The Rabbi's lamp-flame faint
Sinks: would ye raise it? Lend then life from yours,
Spare each his oil-drop! Do I need acquaint

"The Chosen how self-sacrifice ensures
Ten-fold requital?—urge ye emulate
The fame of those Old Just Ones death procures

"Such praise for, that 't is now men's sole debate
Which of the Ten, who volunteered at Rome
To die for glory to our Race, was great

"Beyond his fellows? Was it thou—the comb
Of iron carded, flesh from bone, away,
While thy lips sputtered thro' their bloody foam

" Without a stoppage (O brave Akiba !)
' Hear, Israel, our Lord God is One '? Or thou,
Jischab ?—who smiledst, burning, since there lay,

" Burning along with thee, our Law ! I trow,
Such martyrdom might tax flesh to afford :
While that for which I make petition now,

" To what amounts it ? Youngster, wilt thou hoard
Each minute of long years thou look'st to spend
In dalliance with thy spouse ? Hast thou so soared,

" Singer of songs, all out of sight of friend
And teacher, warbling like a woodland bird,
There 's left no Selah, 'twixt two psalms, to lend

" Our late-so-tuneful quirist ? Thou, averred
The fighter born to plant our lion-flag
Once more on Zion's mount,—doth, all-unheard,

" My pleading fail to move thee ? Toss some rag
Shall staunch our wound, some minute never missed
From swordsman's lustihood like thine ! Wilt lag

"In liberal bestowment, show close fist
When open palm we look for,—thou, wide-known
For statecraft? whom, 't is said, an if thou list,

"The Shah himself would seat beside his throne,
So valued were advice from thee" . . . But here
He stopped short: such a hubbub! Not alone

From those addressed, but, far as well as near,
The crowd broke into clamour: "Mine, mine, mine—
Lop from my life the excrescence, never fear!

"At me thou lookedst, markedst me! Assign
To me that privilege of granting life—
Mine, mine!" Then he: "Be patient! I combine

"The needful portions only, wage no strife
With Nature's law nor seek to lengthen out
The Rabbi's day unduly. 'T is the knife

"I stop,—would cut its thread too short. About
As much as helps life last the proper term,
The appointed Fourscore,—that I crave and scout

"A too-prolonged existence. Let the worm
Change at fit season to the butterfly!
And here a story strikes me, to confirm

"This judgment. Of our worthies, none ranks high
As Perida who kept the famous school:
None rivalled him in patience: none! For why?

"In lecturing it was his constant rule,
Whatever he expounded, to repeat
—Ay, and keep on repeating, lest some fool

"Should fail to understand him fully—(feat
Unparalleled, Uzzean!)—do ye mark?—
Five hundred times! So might he entrance beat

"For knowledge into howsoever dark
And dense the brain-pan. Yet it happed, at close
Of one especial lecture, not one spark

"Of light was found to have illumed the rows
Of pupils round their pedagogue. 'What, still
Impenetrable to me? Then—here goes!'

"And for a second time he sets the rill
Of knowledge running, and five hundred times
More re-repeats the matter—and gains *nil.*

"Out broke a voice from heaven: 'Thy patience climbs
Even thus high. Choose! Wilt thou, rather, quick
Ascend to bliss—or, since thy zeal sublimes

"'Such drudgery, will thy back still bear its crick,
Bent o'er thy class,—thy voice drone spite of drouth,—
Five hundred years more at thy desk wilt stick?'

"'To heaven with me!' was in the good man's mouth,
When all his scholars,—cruel-kind were they!—
Stopped utterance, from East, West, North and South,

"Rending the welkin with their shout of 'Nay—
No heaven as yet for our instructor! Grant
Five hundred years on earth for Perida!'

"And so long did he keep instructing! Want
Our Master no such misery! I but take
Three months of life marital. Ministrant

"Be thou of so much, Poet! Bold I make,
Swordsman, with thy frank offer!—and conclude,
Statist, with thine! One year,—ye will not shake

"My purpose to accept no more. So rude?
The very boys and girls, forsooth, must press
And proffer their addition? Thanks! The mood

"Is laudable, but I reject, no less,
One month, week, day of life more. Leave my gown,
Ye overbold ones! Your life's gift, you guess,

"Were good as any? Rudesby, get thee down!
Set my feet free, or fear my staff! Farewell,
Seniors and saviours, sharers of renown

"With Jochanan henceforward!" Straightway fell
Sleep on the sufferer; who awoke in health,
Hale everyway, so potent was the spell.

O the rare Spring-time! Who is he by stealth
Approaches Jochanan?—embowered that sits
Under his vine and figtree mid the wealth

Of garden-sights and sounds, since intermits
Never the turtle's coo, nor stays nor stints
The rose her smell. In homage that befits

The musing Master, Tsaddik, see, imprints
A kiss on the extended foot, low bends
Forehead to earth, then, all-obsequious, hints

"What if it should be time? A period ends—
That of the Lover's gift—his quarter-year
Of lustihood: 't is just thou make amends,

"Return that loan with usury: so, here
Come I, of thy Disciples delegate,
Claiming our lesson from thee. Make appear

"Thy profit from experience! Plainly state
How men should Love!" Thus he: and to him thus
The Rabbi: "Love, ye call it?—rather, Hate!

"What wouldst thou? Is it needful I discuss
Wherefore new sweet wine, poured in bottles caked
With old strong wine's deposit, offers us

"Spoilt liquor we recoil from, thirst-unslaked?
Like earth-smoke from a crevice, out there wound
Languors and yearnings: not a sense but ached

"Weighed on by fancied form and feature, sound
Of silver word and sight of sunny smile:
No beckoning of a flower-branch, no profound

"Purple of noon-oppression, no light wile
O' the West wind, but transformed itself till—brief—
Before me stood the phantasy ye style

"Youth's love, the joy that shall not come to grief,
Born to endure, eternal, unimpaired
By custom the accloyer, time the thief.

"Had Age's hard cold knowledge only spared
That ignorance of Youth! But now the dream,
Fresh as from Paradise, alighting fared

"As fares the pigeon, finding what may seem
Her nest's safe hollow holds a snake inside
Coiled to enclasp her. See, Eve stands supreme

"In youth and beauty! Take her for thy bride!
What Youth deemed crystal, Age finds out was dew
Morn set a-sparkle, but which noon quick dried

"While Youth bent gazing at its red and blue
Supposed perennial,—never dreamed the sun
Which kindled the display would quench it too.

"Graces of shape and colour—everyone
With its appointed period of decay
When ripe to purpose! 'Still, these dead and done,

"'Survives the woman-nature—the soft sway
Of undefinable omnipotence
O'er our strong male-stuff, we of Adam's clay.'

"Ay, if my physics taught not why and whence
The attraction.' Am I like the simple steer
Who, from his pasture lured inside the fence

"Where yoke and goad await him, holds that mere
Kindliness prompts extension of the hand
Hollowed for barley, which drew near and near

"His nose—in proof that, of the horned band,
The farmer best affected him? Beside,
Steer, since his calfhood, got to understand

"Farmers a many in the world so wide
Were ready with a handful just as choice
Or choicer—maize and cummin, treats untried.

"Shall I wed wife, and all my days rejoice
I gained the peacock? 'Las me, round I look,
And lo—'With me thou wouldst have blamed no voice

"'Like hers that daily deafens like a rook:
I am the phœnix!'—'I, the lark, the dove,
—The owl,' for aught knows he who blindly took

"Peacock for partner, while the vale, the grove,
The plain held bird-mates in abundance. There!
Youth, try fresh capture! Age has found out Love

"Long ago. War seems better worth man's care.
But leave me! Disappointment finds a balm
Haply in slumber." "This first step o' the stair

"To knowledge fails me, but the victor's palm
Lies on the next to tempt him overleap
A stumbling-block. Experienced, gather calm,

"Thou excellence of Judah, cured by sleep
Which ushers in the Warrior, to replace
The Lover! At due season I shall reap

"Fruit of my planting!" So, with lengthened face,
Departed Tsaddik: and three moons more waxed
And waned, and not until the Summer-space

Waned likewise, any second visit taxed
The Rabbi's patience. But at three months' end,
Behold, supine beneath a rock, relaxed

The sage lay musing till the noon should spend
Its ardour. Up comes Tsaddik, who but he,
With "Master, may I warn thee, nor offend,

"That time comes round again? We look to see
Sprout from the old branch—not the youngling twig—
But fruit of sycamine: deliver me,

"To share among my fellows, some plump fig,
Juicy as seedy! That same man of war,
Who, with a scantling of his store, made big

"Thy starveling nature, caused thee, safe from scar,
To share his gains by long acquaintanceship
With bump and bruise and all the knocks that are

"Of battle dowry,—he bids loose thy lip,
Explain the good of battle! Since thou know'st
Let us know likewise! Fast the moments slip,

"More need that we improve them!"—"Ay, we boast,
We warriors in our youth, that with the sword
Man goes the swiftliest to the uttermost—

Takes the straight way thro' lands yet unexplored
To absolute Right and Good,—may so obtain
God's glory and man's weal too long ignored,

"Too late attained by preachments all in vain—
The passive process. Knots get tangled worse
By toying with: does cut cord close again?

"Moreover there is blessing in the curse
Peace-praisers call war. What so sure evolves
All the capacities of soul, proves nurse

"Of that self-sacrifice in men which solves
The riddle—*Wherein differs Man from beast?*
Foxes boast cleverness and courage wolves:

"Nowhere but in mankind is found the least
Touch of an impulse 'To our fellows—good
I' the highest!—not diminished but increased

"'By the condition plainly understood
—Such good shall be attained at price of hurt
I' the highest to ourselves!' Fine sparks, that brood

"Confusedly in Man, 't is war bids spurt
Forth into flame: as fares the meteor-mass,
Whereof no particle but holds inert

"Some seed of light and heat, however crass
The enclosure, yet avails not to discharge
Its radiant birth before there come to pass

"Some push external,—strong to set at large
Those dormant fire-seeds, whirl them in a trice
Through heaven and light up earth from marge to marge:

"Since force by motion makes—what erst was ice—
Crash into fervency and so expire,
Because some Djinn has hit on a device

"For proving the full prettiness of fire!
Ay, thus we prattle—young: but old—why, first,
Where 's that same Right and Good—(the wise inquire)—

"So absolute, it warrants the outburst
Of blood, tears, all war's woeful consequence,
That comes of the fine flaring? Which plague cursed

"The more your benefited Man—offence,
Or what suppressed the offender? Say it did—
Show us the evil cured by violence,

"Submission cures not also! Lift the lid
From the maturing crucible, we find
Its slow sure coaxing-out of virtue hid

"In that same meteor-mass, hath uncombined
Those particles and, yielding for result
Gold, not mere flame, by so much leaves behind

"The heroic product. E'en the simple cult
Of Edom's children wisely bids them turn
Cheek to the smiter with '*Sic Jesus vult.*'

"Say there 's a tyrant by whose death we earn
Freedom, and justify a war to wage:
Good!—were we only able to discern

"Exactly how to reach and catch and cage
Him only and no innocent beside!
Whereas the folk whereon war wreaks its rage

"—How shared they his ill-doing? Far and wide
The victims of our warfare strew the plain,
Ten thousand dead, whereof not one but died

"In faith that vassals owed their suzerain
Life: therefore each paid tribute,—honest soul,—
To that same Right and Good ourselves are fain

"To call exclusively our end. From bole
(Since ye accept in me a sycamine)
Pluck, eat, digest a fable—yea, the sole

"Fig I afford you! 'Dost thou dwarf my vine?'
(So did a certain husbandman address
The tree which faced his field), 'Receive condign

"'Punishment, prompt removal by the stress
Of axe I forthwith lay unto thy root!'
Long did he hack and hew, the root no less

"As long defied him, for its tough strings shoot
As deep down as the boughs above aspire:
All that he did was—shake to the tree's foot

"Leafage and fruitage, things we most require
For shadow and refreshment: which good deed
Thoroughly done, behold the axe-haft tires

"His hand, and he desisting leaves unfreed
The vine he hacked and hewed for. Comes a frost,
One natural night's work, and there 's little need

"Of hacking, hewing: lo, the tree 's a ghost!
Perished it starves, black death from topmost bough
To farthest-reaching fibre! Shall I boast

"My rough work,—warfare,—helped more? Loving, now—
That, by comparison, seems wiser, since
The loving fool was able to avow

"He could effect his purpose, just evince
Love's willingness,—once 'ware of what she lacked,
His loved one,—to go work for that, nor wince

"At self-expenditure: he neither hacked
Nor hewed, but when the lady of his field
Required defence because the sun attacked,

"He, failing to obtain a fitter shield,
Would interpose his body, and so blaze,
Blest in the burning. Ah, were mine to wield

"The intellectual weapon—poet-lays,—
How preferably had I sung one song
Which . . . but my sadness sinks me: go your ways!

"I sleep out disappointment." "Come along,
Never lose heart! There 's still as much again
Of our bestowment left to right the wrong

"Done by its earlier moiety—explain
Wherefore, who may! The Poet's mood comes next.
Was he not wishful the poetic vein

"Should pulse within him? Jochanan, thou reck'st
Little of what a generous flood shall soon
Float thy clogged spirit free and unperplexed

"Above dry dubitation! Song 's the boon
Shall make amends for my untoward mistake
That Joshua-like thou couldst bid sun and moon—

"Fighter and Lover,—which for most men make
All they descry in heaven,—stand both stock-still
And lend assistance. Poet shalt thou wake!"

Autumn brings Tsaddik. "Ay, there speeds the rill
Loaded with leaves: a scowling sky, beside:
The wind makes olive-trees up yonder hill

"Whiten and shudder—symptoms far and wide
Of gleaning-time's approach; and glean good store
May I presume to trust we shall, thou tried

"And ripe experimenter! Three months more
Have ministered to growth of Song: that graft
Into thy sterile stock has found at core

"Moisture, I warrant, hitherto unquaffed
By boughs, however florid, wanting sap
Of prose-experience which provides the draught

"Which song-sprouts, wanting, wither: vain we tap
A youngling stem all green and immature:
Experience must secret the stuff, our hap

"Will be to quench Man's thirst with, glad and sure
That fancy wells up through corrective fact:
Missing which test of truth, though flowers allure

"The goodman's eye with promise, soon the pact
Is broken, and 't is flowers,—mere words,—he finds
When things,—that 's fruit,—he looked for. Well, once
cracked

"The nut, how glad my tooth the kernel grinds!
Song may henceforth boast substance! Therefore, hail
Proser and poet, perfect in both kinds!

"Thou from whose eye hath dropped the envious scale
Which hides the truth of things and substitutes
Deceptive show, unaided optics fail

"To transpierce,—hast entrusted to the lute's
Soft but sure guardianship some unrevealed
Secret shall lift mankind above the brutes

"As only knowledge can?" "A fount unsealed"
(Sighed Jochanan) "should seek the heaven in leaps
To die in dew-gems—not find death, congealed

"By contact with the cavern's nether deeps,
Earth's secretest foundation where, enswathed
In dark and fear, primæval mystery sleeps—

"Petrific fount wherein my fancies bathed
And straight turned ice. My dreams of good and fair
In soaring upwards had dissolved, unscathed

"By any influence of the kindly air,
Singing, as each took flight, The Future—that 's
Our destination, mists turn rainbows there,

"Which sink to fog, confounded in the flats
O' the Present! Day 's the song-time for the lark,
Night for her music boasts but owls and bats.

"And what 's the Past but night—the deep and dark
Ice-spring I speak of, corpse-thicked with its drowned
Dead fancies which no sooner touched the mark

"They aimed at—fact—than all at once they found
Their film-wings freeze, henceforth unfit to reach
And roll in æther, revel—robed and crowned

"As truths, confirmed by falsehood all and each—
Sovereign and absolute and ultimate!
Up with them, skyward, Youth, ere Age impeach

"Thy least of promises to re-instate
Adam in Eden! Sing on, ever sing,
Chirp till thou burst!—the fool cicada's fate,

" Who holds that after Summer next comes Spring,
Than Summer's self sun-warmed, spice-scented more.
Fighting was better! There, no fancy-fling

" Pitches you past the point was reached of yore
By Sampsons, Abners, Joabs, Judases,
The mighty men of valour who, before

" Our little day, did wonders none profess
To doubt were fable and not fact, so trust
By fancy-flights to emulate much less.

" Were I a Statesman, now! Why, that were just
To pinnacle my soul, mankind above,
A-top the universe: no vulgar lust

" To gratify—fame, greed, at this remove
Looked down upon so far—or overlooked
So largely, rather—that mine eye should rove

" World-wide and rummage earth, the many-nooked,
Yet find no unit of the human flock
Caught straying but straight comes back hooked and
crooked

"By the strong shepherd who, from out his stock
Of aids proceeds to treat each ailing fleece,
Here stimulate to growth, curtail and dock

"There, baldness or excrescence,—that, with grease,
This, with up-grubbing of the bristly patch
Born of the tick-bite. How supreme a peace

"Steals o'er the Statist,—while, in wit, a match
For shrewd Ahithophel, in wisdom . . . well,
His name escapes me—somebody, at watch

"And ward, the fellow of Ahithophel
In guidance of the Chosen!"—at which word
Eyes closed and fast asleep the Rabbi fell.

"Cold weather!" shivered Tsaddik. "Yet the hoard
Of the sagacious ant shows garnered grain,
Ever abundant most when fields afford

"Least pasture, and alike disgrace the plain
Tall tree and lowly shrub. 'T is so with us
Mortals: our age stores wealth ye seek in vain

"While busy youth culls just what we discuss
At leisure in the last days: and the last
Truly are these for Jochanan, whom thus

"I make one more appeal to! Thine amassed
Experience, now or never, let escape
Some portion of! For I perceive aghast

"The end approaches, while they jeer and jape,
These sons of Shimei: 'Justify your boast!
What have ye gained from Death by twelve months'
rape?'

"Statesman, what cure hast thou for—least and
most—
Popular grievances? What nostrum, say,
Will make the Rich and Poor, expertly dosed,

"Forget disparity, bid each go gay
That, with his bauble,—with his burden, this?
Propose an alkahest shall melt away

"Men's lacquer, show by prompt analysis
Which is the metal, which the make-believe,
So that no longer brass shall find, gold miss

"Coinage and currency? Make haste, retrieve
The precious moments, Master!" Whereunto
There snarls an "Ever laughing in thy sleeve,

"Pert Tsaddik? Youth indeed sees plain a clue
To guide man where life's wood is intricate:
How shall he fail to thrid its thickest through

"When every oak-trunk takes the eye? Elate
He goes from bole to brushwood, plunging finds—
Smothered in briars—that the small 's the great!

"All men are men: I would all minds were minds!
Whereas 't is just the many's mindless mass
That most needs helping: labourers and hinds

"We legislate for—not the cultured class
Which law-makes for itself nor needs the whip
And bridle,—proper help for mule and ass,

"Did the brutes know! In vain our statesmanship
Strives at contenting the rough multitude:
Still the ox cries 'T is me thou shouldst equip

" 'With equine trappings!' or, in humbler mood,
'Cribful of corn for me! and, as for work—
Adequate rumination o'er my food!'

" Better remain a Poet! Needs it irk
Such an one if light, kindled in his sphere,
Fail to transfuse the Mizraim cold and murk

" Round about Goshen? Though light disappear,
Shut inside,—temporary ignorance
Got outside of, lo, light emerging clear

" Shows each astonished starer the expanse
Of heaven made bright with knowledge! That 's the
way,
The only way—I see it at a glance—

" To legislate for earth! As poet. . . . Stay!
What is . . . I would that . . . were it . . . I had
been . . .
O sudden change, as if my arid clay

" Burst into bloom! . . ." " A change indeed, I ween,
And change the last!" sighed Tsaddik as he kissed
The closing eyelids. " Just as those serene

"Princes of Night apprised me! Our acquist
Of life is spent, since corners only four
Hath Aisch, and each in turn was made desist

"In passage round the Pole (O Mishna's lore—
Little it profits here!) by strenuous tug
Of friends who eked out thus to full fourscore

"The Rabbi's years. I see each shoulder shrug!
What have we gained? Away the Bier may roll!
To-morrow, when the Master's grave is dug,

"In with his body I may pitch the scroll
I hoped to glorify with, text and gloss,
My Science of Man's Life: one blank 's the whole!

"Love, war, song, statesmanship—no gain, all loss,
The stars' bestowment! We on our return
To-morrow merely find—not gold but dross,

"The body not the soul. Come, friends, we learn
At least thus much by our experiment—
That—that . . . well, find what, whom it may concern!"

But next day through the city rumours went
Of a new persecution; so, they fled
All Israel, each man,—this time,—from his tent,

Tsaddik among the foremost. When, the dread
Subsiding, Israel ventured back again
Some three months after, to the cave they sped

Where lay the Sage,—a reverential train!
Tsaddik first enters. "What is this I view?
The Rabbi still alive? No stars remain

"Of Aisch to stop within their courses. True,
I mind me, certain gamesome boys must urge
Their offerings on me: can it be—one threw

"Life at him and it stuck? There needs the scourge
To teach that urchin manners! Prithee, grant
Forgiveness if we pretermit thy dirge

"Just to explain no friend was ministrant,
This time, of life to thee! Some jackanapes,
I gather, has presumed to foist his scant

"Scurvy unripe existence—wilding grapes
Grass-green and sorrel-sour—on that grand wine,
Mighty as mellow, which, so fancy shapes

"May fitly image forth this life of thine
Fed on the last low fattening lees—condensed
Elixir, no milk-mildness of the vine!

"Rightly with Tsaddik wert thou now incensed
Had he been witting of the mischief wrought
When, for elixir, verjuice he dispensed!"

And slowly woke,—like Shushan's flower besought
By over-curious handling to unloose
The curtained secrecy wherein she thought

Her captive bee, mid store of sweets to choose,
Would loll, in gold pavilioned lie unteased,
Sucking on, sated never,—whose, O whose

Might seem that countenance, uplift, all eased
Of old distraction and bewilderment,
Absurdly happy? "How ye have appeased

"The strife within me, bred this whole content,
This utter acquiescence in my past,
Present and future life,—by whom was lent

"The power to work this miracle at last,—
Exceeds my guess. Though—*ignorance confirmed*
By knowledge sounds like paradox, I cast

"Vainly about to tell you—fitlier termed—
Of calm struck by encountering opposites,
Each nullifying either! Henceforth wormed

"From out my heart is every snake that bites
The dove that else would brood there: doubt, which
kills
With hiss of 'What if sorrows end delights?'

"Fear which stings ease with 'Work the Master wills!
Experience which coils round and strangles quick
Each hope with 'Ask the Past if hoping skills

"'To work accomplishment, or proves a trick
Wiling thee to endeavour! Strive, fool, stop
Nowise, so live, so die—that 's law! why kick

"'Against the pricks?' All out-wormed! Slumber, drop
Thy films once more and veil the bliss within!
Experience strangle hope? Hope waves a-top

"Her wings triumphant! Come what will, I win,
Whoever loses! Every dream 's assured
Of soberest fulfilment. Where 's a sin

"Except in doubting that the light, which lured
The unwary into darkness, meant no wrong
Had I but marched on bold, nor paused immured

"By mists I should have pressed thro', passed along
My way henceforth rejoicing? Not the boy's
Passionate impulse he conceits so strong,

"Which, at first touch, truth, bubble-like, destroys,—
Not the man's slow conviction 'Vanity
Of vanities—alike my griefs and joys!'

"Ice!—thawed (look up) each bird, each insect by—
(Look round) by all the plants that break in bloom,
(Look down) by every dead friend's memory

"That smiles 'Am I the dust within my tomb?'
Not either, but both these—amalgam rare—
Mix in a product, not from Nature's womb,

"But stuff which He the Operant—who shall dare
Describe His operation?—strikes alive
And thaumaturgic. I nor know nor care

"How from this tohu-bohu—hopes which dive,
And fears which soar—faith, ruined through and through
By doubt, and doubt, faith treads to dust—revive

"In some surprising sort,—as see, they do!—
Not merely foes no longer but fast friends.
What does it mean unless—O strange and new

"Discovery!—this life proves a wine-press—blends
Evil and good, both fruits of Paradise,
Into a novel drink which—who intends

"To quaff, must bear a brain for ecstasies
Attempered, not this all-inadequate
Organ which, quivering within me, dies

"—Nay, lives!—what, how,—too soon, or else too late—
I was—I am . . ." ("He babbleth!" Tsaddik mused)
"O Thou Almighty who canst re-instate

"Truths in their primal clarity, confused
By man's perception, which is man's and made
To suit his service,—how, once disabused

"Of reason which sees light half shine half shade,
Because of flesh, the medium that adjusts
Purity to his visuals, both an aid

"And hindrance,—how to eyes earth's air encrusts,
When purged and perfect to receive truth's beam
Pouring itself on the new sense it trusts

"With all its plenitude of power,—how seen
The intricacies now, of shade and shine,
Oppugnant natures—Right and Wrong, we deem

"Irreconcilable? O eyes of mine,
Freed now of imperfection, ye avail
To see the whole sight, nor may uncombine

" Henceforth what, erst divided, caused you quail—
So huge the chasm between the false and true,
The dream and the reality! All hail,

" Day of my soul's deliverance—day the new,
The never-ending! What though every shape
Whereon I wreaked my yearning to pursue

" Even to success each semblance of escape
From my own bounded self to some all-fair
All-wise external fancy, proved a rape

" Like that old giant's, feigned of fools—on air,
Not solid flesh? How otherwise? To love—
That lesson was to learn not here—but there—

" On earth, not here! 'T is there we learn,—there prove
Our parts upon the stuff we needs must spoil,
Striving at mastery, there bend above

" The spoiled clay potsherds, many a year of toil
Attests the potter tried his hand upon,
Till sudden he arose, wiped free from soil

"His hand cried 'So much for attempt—anon
Performance! Taught to mould the living vase,
What matter the cracked pitchers dead and gone?'

"Could I impart and could thy mind embrace
The secret, Tsaddik!" "Secret none to me!"
Quoth Tsaddik, as the glory on the face

Of Jochanan was quenched. "The truth I see
Of what that excellence of Judah wrote,
Doughty Halaphta. This a case must be

"Wherein, though the last breath have passed the throat,
So that 'The man is dead' we may pronounce,
Yet is the Ruach—(thus do we denote

"The imparted Spirit)—in no haste to bounce
From its entrusted Body,—some three days
Lingers ere it relinquish to the pounce

"Of hawk-clawed Death his victim. Further says
Halaphta, 'Instances have been, and yet
Again may be, when saints, whose earthly ways

" 'Tend to perfection, very nearly get
To heaven while still on earth: and, as a fine
Interval shows where waters pure have met

" 'Waves brackish, in a mixture, sweet with brine,
That 's neither sea nor river but a taste
Of both—so meet the earthly and divine

" 'And each is either.' Thus I hold him graced—
Dying on earth, half inside and half out,
Wholly in heaven, who knows? My mind embraced

" Thy secret, Jochanan, how dare I doubt?
Follow thy Ruach, let earth, all it can,
Keep of the leavings!" Thus was brought about

The sepulture of Rabbi Jochanan:
Thou hast him,—sinner-saint, live-dead, boy-man,—
Schiphaz, on Bendimir, in Farzistan!

NOTE.—This story can have no better authority than that of the treatise, existing dispersedly in fragments of Rabbinical writing, משך של רבים בדים, from which I might have helped myself more liberally. Thus, instead of the simple reference to "Moses' stick," —but what if I make amends by attempting three illustrations, when some thirty might be composed on the same subject, equally justifying that pithy proverb ממשה עד משה לא קם כמשה.

I.

MOSES the Meek was thirty cubits high,
The staff he strode with—thirty cubits long:
And when he leapt, so muscular and strong
Was Moses that his leaping neared the sky
By thirty cubits more: we learn thereby
He reached full ninety cubits—am I wrong?—
When, in a fight slurred o'er by sacred song,
With staff outstretched he took a leap to try
The just dimensions of the giant Og.
And yet he barely touched—this marvel lacked
Posterity to crown earth's catalogue
Of marvels—barely todched—to be exact—
The giant's ankle-bone, remained a frog
That fain would match an ox in stature: fact!

II.

And this same fact has met with unbelief:
How saith a certain traveller? "Young, I chanced
To come upon an object—if thou canst,
Guess me its name and nature! 'T was, in brief,
White, hard, round, hollow, of such length, in chief,
—And this is what especially enhanced
My wonder—that it seemed, as I advanced,

Never to end. Bind up within thy sheaf
Of marvels, this—Posterity! I walked
From end to end, four hours walked I, who go
A goodly pace,—and found—I have not baulked
Thine expectation, Stranger? Ay or No?
'Twas but Og's thigh-bone, all the while, I stalked
Alongside of: respect to Moses, though!"

III.

Og's thigh-bone—if ye deem its measure strange,
Myself can witness to much length of shank
Even in birds. Upon a water's bank
Once halting, I was minded to exchange
Noon heat for cool. Quoth I, "On many a grange
I have seen storks perch—legs both long and lank:
Yon stork's must touch the bottom of this tank,
Since on its top doth wet no plume derange
Of the smooth breast. I'll bathe there!" "Do not so!"
Warned me a voice from heaven. "A man let drop
His axe into that shallow rivulet—
As thou accountest—seventy years ago:
It fell and fell and still without a stop
Keeps falling, nor has reached the bottom yet."

NEVER THE TIME AND THE PLACE.

NEVER the time and the place
And the loved one all together!
This path—how soft to pace!
This May—what magic weather!
Where is the loved one's face?
In a dream that loved one's face meets mine,
But the house is narrow, the place is bleak
Where, outside, rain and wind combine
With a furtive ear, if I strive to speak,
With a hostile eye at my flushing cheek,
With a malice that marks each word, each sign!
O enemy sly and serpentine,
Uncoil thee from the waking man!
Do I hold the Past
Thus firm and fast
Yet doubt if the Future hold I can?

This path so soft to pace shall lead
Thro' the magic of May to herself indeed !
Or narrow if needs the house must be,
Outside are the storms and strangers : we—
Oh, close, safe, warm sleep I and she,
—I and she !

PAMBO.

Suppose that we part (work done, comes play)
With a grave tale told in crambo
—As our hearty sires were wont to say—
Whereof the hero is Pambo?

Do you happen to know who Pambo was?
Nor I—but this much have heard of him:
He entered one day a college-class,
And asked—was it so absurd of him?—

"May Pambo learn wisdom ere practise it?
In wisdom I fain would ground me:
Since wisdom is centred in Holy Writ,
Some psalm to the purpose expound me!"

"That psalm," the Professor smiled, "shall be
Untroubled by doubt which dirtieth
Pellucid streams when an ass like thee
Would drink there—the Nine-and-thirtieth.

"Verse first: *I said I will look to my ways*
That I with my tongue offend not.
How now? Why stare? Art struck in amaze?
Stop, stay! The smooth line hath an end knot!

"He 's gone!—disgusted my text should prove
Too easy to need explaining?
Had he waited, the blockhead might find I move
To matter that pays remaining!"

Long years went by, when—"Ha, who 's this?
Do I come on the restive scholar
I had driven to Wisdom's goal, I wis,
But that he slipped the collar?

"What? Arms crossed, brow bent, thought-immersed?
A student indeed! Why scruple
To own that the lesson proposed him first
Scarce suited so apt a pupil?

"Come back! From the beggarly elements
To a more recondite issue
We pass till we reach, at all events,
Some point that may puzzle . . Why 'pish' you?"

From the ground looked piteous up the head :
" Daily and nightly, Master,
Your pupil plods thro' that text you read,
Yet gets on never the faster.

" At the self-same stand,—now old, then young !
I will look to my ways—were doing
As easy as saying !—*that I with my tongue*
Offend not—and 'scape pooh-poohing

" From sage and simple, doctor and dunce ?
Ah, nowise ! Still doubts so muddy
The stream I would drink at once,—but once !
That—thus I resume my study ! "

Brother, brother, I share the blame,
Arcades sumus ambo !
Darkling, I keep my sunrise-aim,
Lack not the critic's flambeau,
And *look to my ways*, yet, much the same,
Offend with my tongue—like Pambo !

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